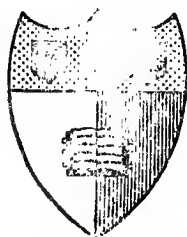


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WHISPERS

ROSY

A RUNAWAY WOMAN

Illustrated by George Wright

CHILDREN OF THE DESERT

BONNIE MAY

Illustrated by Reginald Birch

THE SANDMAN'S MOUNTAIN

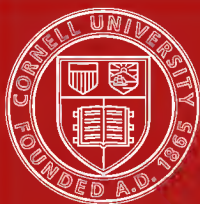
Illustrated by Paul Bransom

THE SANDMAN'S FOREST

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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BY
LOUIS DODGE

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1921

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Published March, 1921

THE SCRIBNER PRESS

TO

LIEUT.-COL. SYDNEY A. CLOMAN, U. S. A.

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TAWI TAWI

CHAPTER I.

HOW FIDESIA VISITS A SEER IN THE DESERT AND HOW
A STORY OF A PRINCESS AND TWO SWANS IS
RELATED TO HER

SHE stood at her father's door and looked away over the three desert trails, one after another. It was the sunset hour and it would not have been unusual if there had been lonely riders within her range of vision, or if she had caught sight of Padre Columbo driving his goats home for the night. But the trails were empty.

She sighed and laid her hand, palm outward, against her eyes. The austere solemnity of the desert world engulfed everything, including her heart. For the moment it seemed to her that she could not bear her loneliness. She lived alone with her father save for the men and women who served, faithfully yet rather silently, about the house and ranch. Her mother had been dead many years. Just now her father had ridden away in the direction of the Rio Grande, a mile away, to inspect a new canal which was to make more of his barren acres green and fruitful.

She removed her hand from before her eyes and viewed the trails again. They were emerging from the dim expanse of the desert in a more clearly defined

way, now that the night was falling. She knew that when the night came they would stand forth, distinctly pallid, amid the surrounding obscurities. They ran in three directions: one to Eagle Pass, another to the Quemado Settlement, and the third straight north, climbing the distant red ridge beyond which their neighbor, Padre Columbo, had his dwelling.

Padre Columbo was not a priest. He was a prophet. He dwelt alone, tending his flock and reading the stars and communicating with spirits. No, he was not a priest. He was not even a Christian, according to those who served God in the usual way. He was openly frowned upon by the Eagle Pass priest, who hinted that it was not good for simple folk to think about the stars too much, and who emphatically declared that the spirits of the desert were more likely to be evil spirits than any other kind. On one occasion the Eagle Pass priest had whispered to the old woman who vended stewed meat and beans near the broken staircase rising from the Rio Grande that Padre Columbo was *loco*—insane. And the old woman—an *anciana* of simple faith—had inferred from the priest's manner that it would be quite proper for her to inform everybody that Padre Columbo was not in his right mind.

But the girl who stood at her father's door looking out across the trails did not believe that Padre Columbo was insane. She smiled faintly when the thought crossed her mind. He was a good old man, a little strange, strange in that he did not hate the boisterous gringos who galloped past his house with a jingling of spurs and the creaking or slapping sound of saddles; strange in that he believed that God would come to him if he did not strive too impatiently to go to God.

Suddenly the girl felt an irresistible desire to talk

to Padre Columbo. She set forth immediately in the direction of the distant red ridge.

As she advanced into the area of unfruitful earth her bearing underwent certain almost mystic changes. She drew something of tone, or quality, from the little green spikes of sage, from the sprawling nests of cactus, lifting their flat heads serpent-wise; from the stricken old mesquite trees which grew more knotted and gnarled throughout the drought-stricken summers without recording new stages of umbrageous strength.

She became in a measure a tragic figure, even as all the other figures about her suggested tragedy. A certain dark rapture enveloped her. She walked all but noiselessly. It was as if she had become a spirit made visible. She was of a slight yet hardy build: exquisite without being at all delicate. She was strong, perfectly poised. She was surprisingly fair for a daughter of the desert. Born north of the Rio Grande, she was an American girl, though her father was a Spaniard by birth, and her mother had been a Mexican, daughter of an army officer dwelling in Coahuila.

She came to a point where the trail ascended. She could see the top of Padre Columbo's house now. Smoke from its fireplace arose to the sky.

The smoke gladdened her heart as even the thatched roof had not done. To her, smoke was a symbol of intimate companionships, of things delicious and comforting. She welcomed it now the more because she was passing within sight of a disturbing vista: a far-away mesa with a dried water-hole in a saucer-like place, with the bleached bones of cattle strewn about. The cattle, she knew, had died of thirst in a bygone year: waiting dumbly about the place where water had been, waiting for relief, and dying where they stood.

She could never contemplate the suffering of dumb

animals without frowning faintly and pondering over what the priests said about the goodness of God. She somewhat clearly grasped the theory of imperfection in every system. She had no patience with agnosticism. But sometimes she was inclined to believe that Padre Columbo, with his reticent habit of leaving things unsaid, was closer to the truth than the precise persons who had fixed rules for everything. Padre Columbo never said that God must have good reasons for doing this or that. What reason could there be for permitting the dumb beasts to die of thirst—to wait, and call out in vain, and finally perish in agony? Padre Columbo only said, "Ah, the poor beasts . . . !" And a delicate tremor would move his lips.

She came quite to his front door and looked into his hut.

He was not there. The earthen floor was carefully swept; a fire burned in the fireplace. A kettle with three prongs stood over the coals, its lid rising and falling as the steam escaped. There was an appetizing odor of pepper and meat and *frijoles* in the room. The old man's bed, over against the wall under an unglazed window, was neatly made, and a rug of tanned and dyed kid's skin covered the earth before it.

The place did not seem lonely. The bleating of goats was audible: not the impatient call of animals not yet fed, but rather a sound as of a kind of convivality. The flock was safe at home for the night in the corral, which seemed a very good place after the wanderings of the day.

She went out into the lean-to at the rear. She was not eager to find her old neighbor right away. She was sure he was somewhere about, and she enjoyed the sensation of yielding a little to the atmosphere of his house. His presence was there, his very self,

though by chance his body had gone away. She sensed the serenity of a benign old heart, the wistfulness of a lonely mind that was yet not alone, but in the company of angels night and day. She could almost gather the fabric of his dreams into her hands and examine it.

On a bench in the lean-to earthen pots of goat's milk stood. Hanging up under the eaves was another earthen pot containing water. The water, as she knew, he had carried all the way from the river, more than a mile away. There was no nearer source. There were men who vended water in carts, but Padre Columbo was too poor to patronize them. He made a pleasant outing of going to the river in the early mornings.

She advanced another step or two. She was now in an unenclosed garden. The mesquite trees here were really quite like trees: thorny and a little gaunt, it is true, but vigorous and green. Beneath one of the mesquites there was a comfortable old bench which complained and sagged if one sat on it, but which did not quite give way. There were grapevines clambering over the wall of the corral a little further away. Little green grapes like marvelously cut precious stones were among the leaves.

Presently she smiled with a kind of compassionate amusement. She had espied the old seer at last.

He stood with his eyes fixed upon the far horizon, his body at rest. He seemed to be entranced, to be unaware of her presence. His soul was possessing that which was beyond the reach of his hands: perhaps beyond the reach of his comprehension. He was not merely a goatherd now. He was a child of God.

He was a slight man, of a physical symmetry which had been disturbed but little by the weight of years. He was an Indian, rich in the possession of that dig-

nity which the Aztec race bequeathed its sons. In the fading light of day he stood like a figure in bronze, his American garments, which had rid themselves of their alien quality through long association with him, seemingly in complete harmony with all that he was.

She stood regarding him, a faint quiver of amusement about her lips. To her it seemed that he was playing his part as the desert seer of whom people spoke with a certain degree of awe. She thought perhaps he had heard her approach and that he was only pretending not to know that she was there. It was not that she did not believe in magic. She did. But she believed that everything was magical—that life in all its aspects was so mysterious that Padre Columbo's gift of clairvoyance or divination was not particularly wonderful. It was her belief that persons who engage in occult performances of any kind, like reading the future, or even praying for rain, were simply playing a game. Not a foolish game, but rather a lovely childish game in which their hearts might be wholly centered.

She uttered his name. The faint smile on her lips departed when Padre Columbo turned toward her with an air of having been really startled. He seemed to bring his thoughts back to realities. Slowly his eyes began to beam. "Ah, Fidesia!" he exclaimed.

"I thought you were never coming back," she declared.

He smiled wanly, and she noticed as she had often done before that when he smiled his lips and even his chin quivered ever so slightly. "Yes," he replied, "I was coming back. I shall continue to come back for another score of years, I have no doubt."

She looked at him searchingly. "Back from where?" she asked.

He reflected. "How shall I explain?" he said. He

closed his eyes slowly and when he opened them again he was not looking at her. "Our minds go on little journeys of exploration," he said. "Day after day they do this, each day going a little further. They go in search."

"In search?" she echoed.

"For their homeland—for their source . . . there are no words. Should I say—to find God? Each day they go a little further. On very good days they go very far indeed. Then at last they go and do not return. Is it that they have found that which they sought? Who knows? But on that day when they do not return the neighbors come in and say—'We must send for the old woman who washes the bodies of the dead. We must make ready for the burial.'"

After he had spoken he continued to regard her almost as if he did not see her. Then again recognition dawned in his eyes. "It was good of you to come to see me," he said, smiling affectionately. "Come, you shall sit down."

As she took her place on the old bench he fetched a gourd dipper filled with goat's milk. She drank, lifting her face higher and higher until the last drop was gone. The milk was drunk in token of the fact that hospitality was offered and accepted, after which she was to understand that she might not think unkindly of her host, or look with disfavor upon his house, or remember what she had heard to repeat it afterward to the detriment of him who had entertained her.

He took the dipper away and returned to sit by her side.

They did not speak for a time. They sat with their faces to the north, where the night was settling in the sky with deep solemnity. Mile upon mile of stricken desert stretched before them, and beyond the

rim of the desert there were invisible lands which neither Fidesia nor Padre Columbo ever thought of without wonder. First in that vast gulf of space there was the steel highway, the Southern Pacific railroad, cleaving the void and stringing together great cities: San Antonio, El Paso, Los Angeles, and at last San Francisco and the sea. Beyond the railroad there were other boundless lands, fruitful and arrogant, where millions of rich persons dwelt: strangers who—*incredible fact!*—could find little room in their hearts for men and women of Spanish blood or heritages.

Fidesia tried for a moment to picture that land to the north, but she could not do so. She frowned impatiently. She decided to turn immediately to the matter which had brought her to Padre Columbo's house.

"Padre Columbo," she began a little formally, "you know I have never asked you to read my future for me, though I know others have done so."

"It is true," he replied.

"I want to do so now," she said.

He regarded her with a gaze far fonder than a caress. "Ah, my child," he said, "but why? It would be too easy! There is little in the future hidden from those who have compassionate hearts. It is true, all such do not always journey along the same road, but of a certainty they all journey toward heaven."

She nestled back in her seat with a sigh of contentment. There *was* something in the old man's voice and manner . . . She spoke decisively. "But I wasn't thinking of heaven—just now. I was thinking of earth."

He smiled so that the quivering of his lips was very marked. "The difficulty is that one can scarcely say where earth ends and heaven begins," he replied.

She frowned musingly. "I know what you mean," she said, "but—well, I want to talk to you about lovers."

His glance was frankly taunting when he turned to her and asked: "How many lovers?"

She was too intent upon some problem which engrossed her to share his bantering mood. Quite down-rightly she asked, "Is it well for a girl to love a rich man?"

"Yes—but he ought to be her father."

"Then is it well for her to love a poor man?"

"Of a surety. But he ought to be her son."

"But suppose she wishes a husband?"

"Then she should choose a strong man."

"A strong man. . . . Strong of arm or strong of mind?"

"Strong of heart."

"Padre Columbo!" she cried imploringly, "you know you're not helping me!"

He put forth his hard, bronzed hand, and she put her firm white hand into it. "Do you need help, dear child?" he asked.

"I do—at least, I shall," she replied.

He sat musing. Presently he released her hand slowly, as if he were falling asleep. He closed his eyes. "Let us consider your lovers," he said. And presently he continued: "I see one, two. Two of them. There may be others, but two have come forward and I see only them and you."

She clasped her hands silently and listened, fearing to move. Yes, there were two of them.

"They are trying to read your heart, but they cannot. They cannot read each other's hearts. Their minds are darkened by jealousy. It seems they turn to you, and you will not help them." He remained

silent for what seemed to Fidesia a long time; then softly, yet with dramatic intensity, he resumed: "They become obscure to my vision. I can scarcely see them now. . . . Ah, a storm has fallen upon them. A storm rages. It beats upon them, while you stand aside, regarding them. . . . They seem to contend with each other like bitter enemies. There is conflict and rage; and now—ah! They disappear. They disappear in a whirling mist of red. Blood has been shed——"

The girl cried out imploringly, "Whose blood, Padre Columbo?"

The old man started and turned to her blankly. "What did you ask, Fidesia?" he inquired.

She repeated her question: "Whose blood?"

"Did I speak of blood?"

"Oh, Padre Columbo!" she cried impulsively, "I have been fearing—— That's why I have come to you. What am I to do?"

It did not seem to her very wonderful that Padre Columbo had drawn the picture of two lovers. He could scarcely have helped knowing, as everybody on the road from Eagle Pass to the Quemado knew, that she had two lovers. There was scarcely a day on which one of them, either Victoriano or Ramon, did not ride to her father's house. Nor did it seem a matter of clairvoyance that Padre Columbo should foresee trouble between the two men. That was what must be expected. Who in all the valley was so headstrong and firm—for all his silent ways—as Victoriano, or so blithely provoking as Ramon? Yet she was shocked by the prediction of bloodshed.

"Perhaps you might speak to me plainly of your difficulty, Fidesia," suggested the old man.

She reflected. "It began by their being my friends," she said, "Victoriano and Ramon. I couldn't know in

the beginning that they would not always be just friends. They are both wonderful! They never spoke of love. I did not think of marriage save as something far away. Then suddenly I realized that they were lovers. And—and you know there cannot always be two.”

“Victoriano is a fine man,” said Padre Columbo.

“Yes—but so is Ramon.”

“Ah, yes, Ramon is admirable.”

“But not more so than Victoriano!”

The old man smiled.

“They are very different,” she said. “Victoriano—he is so splendid! No man between here and the Big Bend is as brave or strong. Do you know him well, Padre Columbo? Do you know how . . . you see, you need not talk to him all the while. Just being together is enough sometimes. And there’s the way he has of laughing: not when others laugh, but at simple, homely things. Do you know what I mean?”

“I know.”

“And then—children are not shy with him, and old persons lift beaming eyes when he comes. His horse calls to him in the dark as if they were brothers, and his dog never flinches from him.” She paused, her face glowing.

“And Ramon: what has Ramon to set against the perfections of this paragon among men?”

“Ah, Ramon! When I think of Ramon I think also of fine linen on the table, and delicate lights, and blossoms in a vase.”

“And of Victoriano as of bread and meat and shelter in time of storm?”

She flushed, a little piqued. “Ramon is really wonderful, Padre Columbo. He is so learned! He never wants the right word. When others speak he listens

with skill—do you know how rare that is, Padre Columbo?—and laughs precisely at the right time. Not because he is amused always, but because he is kind.”

“A polished gentleman,” interposed the seer.

“Yes, he is!” She glanced at him quickly to be sure that his words hid nothing.

“And honorable?”

She reflected a moment. “I know what you mean,” she said at length. “Why shouldn’t he be? I mean, why do people mistrust men who have elegant ways? Yes, he is honorable.”

The old man nodded. “No doubt you are right,” he said. And after a moment he added, “And the difficulty is in deciding which of the two is the more admirable?”

When she did not reply save by a perplexed frown he seemed to put the matter out of his mind for a time. When he spoke at length it was seemingly to introduce a different subject. “Do you remember the story of the Aztec princess and the swans?” he asked.

She had not heard the story. Indeed, she knew it was a way of Padre Columbo to fabricate little tales for use as illustrations. She waited in silence, fixing her gaze on the somber north, where a lonely star had appeared low in the sky.

The old man began to speak somewhat as if he were addressing a child. “Once upon a time there was a princess named Ixla,” he said, “a princess who had everything her heart desired, because she was both good and beautiful. And the most lovely of all the things she possessed were her two swans, Cloud-in-the-Sky and Snow-on-the-Mountain. Now it chanced that the princess had a cousin, the Princess Citla, who dwelt in an adjoining kingdom; and the Princess Citla also possessed two swans, each more lovely and proud

than the other. But it came to pass that a flock of wild swans flew across the sky above the lake where the Princess Citla's swans were swimming, and the wild swans uttered cries of love as they flew, so that the swans of the Princess Citla, hearing, arose from the water and flew away. Far away they flew until they were like snowflakes in the sky. And they returned to their place no more. Whereupon the Princess Citla took to her bed and was like to die of grief because she had lost her swans.

"Now it came to pass that the King Malinche, father of the Princess Ixla, learned that his brother's daughter, the Princess Citla, was dying of grief for her lost swans. So he summoned his daughter, the Princess Ixla, and said to her, 'Do thou give thy swans to thy cousin.' But the mother of the Princess Ixla, hearing this, spoke in the mild manner of a wise woman, saying, 'She shall give one of her swans to her cousin, and the other she shall keep.'

"The heart of the Princess Ixla bounded with joy because of what her mother had said, since she had feared her father would require her to give up both her swans. And she went straightway to the marble steps which descended to the lake where her swans were, saying, 'I shall decide which of my swans it will be easier to part with.' "

Fidesia began to smile a little now. It was plain that Padre Columbo had not forgotten her, after all.

"But alas! She could not make a choice; and at last she said, 'I cannot give away either of my swans.' She asked her mother, but her mother could not decide for her; and then she searched out her father from among his counselors and asked him which of her swans she should give away. But neither could her

father decide; yet after he had frowned in perplexity he suddenly smote his thigh. 'I know of a wise man who dwelleth in the mountains,' said he. 'He shall be summoned and it shall be his duty to decide.'

"Now when the wise man came he did not even look at the two swans, saying that the merits of swans were rightly known only to the gods. Yet was he not baffled by the task which had been put upon him. Said he to the Princess Ixla: 'Do thou give over looking at thy swans, which will only appear lovelier at the thought of parting. But do thou go to thy chamber and close thy blinds and sit alone. And it may be that the image of one of thy swans will appear to thee more clearly than the image of the other; so shalt thou know which of the two to keep.'

"So the Princess Ixla did as she was bid. And whether the gods aided her or not I cannot say, but this I know: it came to pass that presently she beheld one of her swans very clearly, while the image of the other became indistinct and soon vanished altogether.

"Then did she go to her mother and say, 'O mother, bid them take away my swan, Snow-on-the-Mountain, so that it shall not be there when I look again. And have it given to my cousin, the Princess Citla. For I know now which of my swans is closer to my heart.'"

When Padre Columbo had finished his story he looked at Fidesia whimsically, but she was unaware of this. Her gaze was fixed dreamily on that lonely star in the north. Suddenly she turned toward him.

"Was it the custom for the Princess Ixla to visit the Princess Citla sometimes?" she asked.

The old man was unprepared for the question. "Very likely," he replied, obviously taken aback.

"I am wondering," she continued, "what might have

happened if she ever saw the swan she had given away."

He glanced at her sharply. "She would have been more and more assured every day that she had kept the right swan," he said. "That is the nature of a woman."

She bade him good-night and set off toward her father's house, walking rapidly. Darkness had settled over the desert.

She began to think of her father—of him and of nothing else. That, after all, was the strongest bond her heart knew as yet: her almost maternal fondness for the leonine, gray old Spaniard who was her father. And presently her heart grew light because in the open door of the house across the mesa a loved figure stood outlined against the light in the room beyond. Her father was waiting for her.

CHAPTER II

HOW TRINIDAD VALVERDE, THE SPANIARD, LOOKS WITH
FAVOR UPON THE STRANGER WHO COMES TO
DWELL IN HIS HOUSE

IF any one had said to Trinidad Valverde, "Trinidad, you are a lucky man," the grizzled old father of Fidesia would have stared incredulously. It is not certain that he would have made audible denial, since he was a man who seldom spoke unnecessarily. But certainly he did not consider himself lucky.

He had wandered far since the days of his childhood in the Spanish town of Pamplona, in the shadow of the Cantabrian mountains. As a youth he had drifted to Mexico, where he had become by turns miner and rider and adventurer, and at forty he had amassed nothing more valuable than experience. Then he had married; and rather by chance than design he had journeyed north of the Rio Grande, becoming a citizen of Texas. At about that time his mother had died in Spain, leaving him a small estate; and this he presently converted into a large tract of land near the Rio Grande: an arid tract which he thought to reclaim by means of a small irrigation plant.

He had made a study of irrigation methods in Mexico; and these he applied with immediate and surprising success to his desert tract. He became prosperous, a man of distinction among the American ranchmen who were his neighbors.

After ten years of married life, and nearly as many of marked prosperity, his wife bore him a child, a daughter; and then she died. A Mexican woman was employed as nurse and housekeeper and under her watchful supervision the little daughter, Fidesia, developed promisingly both in mind and body.

There were years during which Valverde seemingly gave little thought to his daughter. He worked hard and became taciturn. He was one of those keen yet somber men who are always a little mysterious. He was very successful. But when Fidesia was six years old he rode away into Eagle Pass one day and visited an American lady whom he knew. When he returned home arrangements had been made for the removal of his daughter to the home of the American lady and for her attendance at the public school.

It was then that Fidesia asserted herself decisively for the first time in her life. She had been a thoughtful, seemingly passive child up to that time. When she learned what her father's plans were she refused to be sent away. She uncovered her heart; and Valverde learned—with strange and exquisite emotions—that the somewhat solemn habit his daughter had of gazing at him at a distance, without speaking to him, was in reality the evidence of an ardent worship.

His glance became like steel when she said "I will not go." But when she began to weep and rushed toward him and hid her face in his coat, he cried out with pleased wonder and tender solace. No, she need not go—at least, not until . . . For the first time he talked to her candidly, freely. It would grieve him to part with her, he explained; but she must have lessons, companions, pleasures. It ended in a compromise, suggested by Fidesia. She was to have a horse in the stable of the American lady, and she was to ride home

every Friday evening, to remain until Monday morning.

It was arranged so. An escort was provided, so that she might come and go safely. But she speedily outgrew the need of an escort. She came and went like a breeze. She became a different person. She made her appearance on Friday evenings with so much of dash and exuberance that her arrival came to be the biggest thing in Valverde's life.

When she was ten her father obtained a somewhat formal report of her status and progress from the lady with whom she made her home in Eagle Pass.

The lady smiled with gratification, yet with something of mystery too, when she was bidden to say how the little girl was getting along.

"She is a very nice child," she said.

"Yes," replied her father, "she is obedient and good."

"I didn't mean precisely that," said the lady. "I mean she is very discriminating, very fastidious. Though of course she is obedient and good, too, as children go."

Her father was puzzled, perhaps slightly alarmed.

"What I mean," continued the lady, "is that she makes her choice and decisions with a certain wilfulness. In all things: in her choice of dresses and ornaments, in her companionships, in her words, her actions."

"And you think——" ventured Valverde, fixing his glance anxiously on the lady.

"That she will be a young woman of character. You shall be proud of her. She is very lovely."

Valverde rode away flushed with pleasure. It was a great thing to be the father of such a child; and

it seemed that the lady had had in mind much that was not to be put into words readily.

It was certain that Fidesia had fallen into very good hands. She was dressed like a little princess of the better sort: not like a doll, but like a real human being for whom proper respect was entertained. She was taught music, as the American expression has it. She went to parties and made her way into the homes of other children who were carefully governed and cherished. She was blessed with a happy heart.

On one occasion—shortly after her twelfth birthday—her father was summoned to Eagle Pass of an evening to attend an entertainment in the Court House Hall. A piano was on the platform. One child after another performed on the piano neatly and accurately. Fidesia appeared at length. She took her place at the piano serenely. Her dark hair in plaits down her back was tied with a crimson bow. Her dark eyes and brows were unruffled. She played quite creditably. But her father was certain that no child in the world had ever played so well. Those thunderous notes in the bass . . . marvelous! He grew red in the face and desired greatly to look about to see envy reflected in the faces of other parents. But he generously refrained from doing this. This was a great occasion for Trinidad Valverde.

One of her developments was at first disconcerting to her father; but upon second thought he concluded that this was the best development of all. She became so thoroughly American: in essence as in outer signs. In her case the democratic influence of the public school had exerted itself perfectly. There was nothing in her manner or moods hinting at those obscure and subtle forms of homesickness which are sometimes noticeable in children of alien stock. She

seemed scarcely conscious of any life save the life she lived. Her playmates and companions were not strange to her save in those ways in which they were strange to one another. Her acceptance of American customs and of the idiomatic speech of American children was complete. She made the acquaintance of American story-writers and found them precisely to her liking. Her first strongly defined consciousness of music came with her knowledge of American melodies. The strongly rhythmic airs of Mexico, with their wild Moorish cadences and backgrounds of coquetry and castanets, seemed lovely—yet alien. She turned, as one who comes home, to the more candid and naïve songs of the Anglo-Saxon peoples: the Scotch and Irish and English melodies which are the American people's heritage, and the plantation melodies which are their own.

When she came galloping home on Friday evenings she made her appearance as an amazing stranger. Her father and the taciturn old *mozo* of the household regarded her with wonder and pride which they strove in vain to hide—somewhat as Peer Gynt was regarded by his mother. They led her by sly suggestion and stratagem to express herself in what were to them outlandish ways. They tricked her into repeating certain vernacular sayings, while they stole glances at each other and revealed merry wrinkles around their eyes. They took furtive notice of her dresses, which were of an extreme simplicity and chasteness. Her father sometimes gazed at her with brooding eyes. He was puzzled. She was his daughter, yet she seemed a kind of guest.

However, he set about to do honor to this bright guest. He had a new house built—a typical Texas ranchhouse—of materials which came from far away.

He bought a piano for her. She had a wonderful boudoir carpeted with dyed kidskins. He directed her to buy books and pictures. And these things he came to cherish because his daughter cherished them. In his secret heart he became inexpressibly proud because he had a daughter who was also a daughter of America.

It is true that with the beginning of those years which mark the beginning of life's decline he gave way occasionally to dark moods. After all, his life was made up chiefly of lonely hours. He had come to a full realization of the fact that one of his long-cherished dreams could never come true. He never should return to Spain. He should complete his life here among men who were not his blood brothers. He thought with bitterness of the ironical chance by which one of his name—Valverde, meaning *a green valley*—should come to end his days where the valleys were never green. He could never go back now. The money was not lacking, but he realized that poverty is almost the least of those impeding agencies which bind a man in his place. It is the years that bind.

However, he was a respected and even admired man in his new home. When he rode into Eagle Pass on a Saturday, sitting proudly erect on a powerful gray horse, every one accosted him gladly. In his advancing years he had become a little heavy, but he retained great vigor. A splendid iron-gray mustache swept away from his powerful chin and jaw. His eyes were tranquil, yet they held an enigmatic, lurking unrest, like the eyes of a lion. He employed a somewhat feudal air of grandeur when in public, and even in his home. He never understood why a man should seek to conceal the fact that he was proud.

When Fidesia was seventeen she graduated from the

Eagle Pass high school. She sat on a platform in a white dress, with the daughter of the banker and the judge and the leading merchants, as well as other children, no less happy and admirable, of poor families. She received a scroll and was applauded. She was frankly happy.

She went home in state. A man came to convey her trunks—three of them. A feast was spread. She was a little self-conscious, but not too much so. She put her arms around her father's neck and kissed him—and kissed him again when he blushed with pride and made a rumbling sound of peace and affection in his throat.

After all, as things go in this world, Trinidad Valverde *was* a lucky man.

CHAPTER III

HOW TWO MEN MEET IN THE HOUSE IN THE DESERT AND HOW BOTH ARE MADE WELCOME

FIDESIA's American ways extended to her friendships. She chose her own intimates; and it was she who decided that it would be proper for her to be kind to both Victoriano and Ramon, men of wholly opposite types.

Victoriano was the son of a land-poor ranchman who owned a tract of many thousands of acres out on the Quemado Road. He was born to a degree of freedom known usually only to Bedouins and gipsies. Named for one of his father's loyal and fearless Mexican riders, his childhood passions, developing rapidly, centered about horses and the range. As a youth he took pride in the fact that he could ride for days on end without crossing the boundaries of his father's land—though the land was all but worthless: barren wastes on which cattle could barely keep life in their bodies. The family life was one of a sort of splendid poverty. The ranch was like a kingdom—but a kingdom without money. Funds to pay taxes and to purchase food and clothing were scraped together precariously. There was neither need nor desire for more. The ranchhouse was large but primitive, with the life of the corral in the rear, and with a gray desert trail winding away into space from the front door.

Victoriano spent the earlier years of his youth at-

tending the public school at the Quemado, one of a small group of boys and girls as unsophisticated as wild antelope. He sat in the one room which housed all the pupils, Mexicans and Americans alike, and looked at his Third Reader as if it were a cunningly devised trap. He finally learned to read fairly well: but from a distance, as it were. He refused to be trapped by printed words. When he wanted to know anything he closed his book and went and found out. Life was his preceptor, action his text. He did not spend a great deal of time in school. The lure of the plains was too strong. He rode far and wide on his father's lands, hunting wild javelinas or chaparral cock or quail. He spent days with his father's riders, becoming mature before his time. He was a sensational horseman, eager to try his hand at conquering the wildest horses in the herds brought in from the range. He acquired habits of silence and solitude, like an old man. From being an overgrown boy he became a stalwart and sinewy man of almost untested strength. He was dark and straight, like a brother to the Indian.

He had known the daughter of Trinidad Valverde since the day she was born. He had from the beginning been a welcome guest in Valverde's house—or rather, on his ranch. He had comparatively little use for a house. While Fidesia was yet a small girl she and Victoriano had explored wide tracts of the Rio Grande valley together. They had early formed a kind of tacit partnership. Fidesia found him gentle and tractable, quietly cheerful, quickly efficient when minor mishaps occurred. She was always blissfully content when she could ride with him. They often rode together for miles without speaking, so perfectly were they in harmony.

He used to spend days with her father when she was away at school, seemingly content with no society other than that of the taciturn Spaniard. He came to the ranch occasionally on a Sunday when Fidesia was at home. She accepted this gladly and as a matter of course. He always anticipated her wishes. He sat, tensely attentive, when she played on the piano, and laughed delightedly when the widely ranging cadenza occurred in *My Old Kentucky Home* with variations. He watched rather than listened. The movements of her fingers were simply delicious. When she leaned a little forward and to the right, while her fingers went crossing one another up the keyboard, he held his breath and conquered the impulse to shout, as if he were witnessing a race. The long black plait of her hair would fall forward when she did this. She had a habit of dashing the plait over her shoulder with a movement which caused his heart to stand still.

When one day he saw her for the first time with her hair combed straight up from her neck and forehead and done into coils, with little wisps playing at liberty, he slipped out into the corral as if he feared he might shout in spite of everything. "And long skirts!" he confided to persons who were nowhere about.

He felt suddenly alarmed. She was a young lady now. The days of their delightful intimacy were at an end, he was sure. He would have been savagely angry with himself if a thought of making love to her had crossed his mind. He believed it would never be at all proper for him to do this. She was much too fine for him. However, he reserved the right to watch over her from a distance. Other men for whom she was too fine must not be permitted to approach too closely. He felt that his work was cut out for him,

as Fidesia's guardian, when a youth named Ramon presently appeared.

It was in Eagle Pass, while she was yet in school, that Fidesia first met Ramon.

He was slight and youthful and blond, a gay and vital creature. He had just graduated from the University at Austin. He had come out to Maverick County to rough it, he said. He lived at the old Dolch Hotel and kept a horse and a dog, both thoroughbreds. He was the sort of man who must be waited upon all the time. He was well liked, nevertheless, because of his generosity and his blithe manner. He became acquainted with every one: he had brought letters from his father, a San Antonio banker.

He rode through Eagle Pass one day on his thoroughbred horse: a splendid animal with a bony, box-shaped nose and sensitive nostrils and large, restless eyes set well apart. At a street crossing he drew up sharply because a girl had appeared before him. He lifted his cap by way of apology, though she had not been at all alarmed. She met his glance for an instant before he moved on. His eyes were blue and piercing, with humor and graciousness in them.

The girl was Fidesia, and she went on her way musing pleasantly. The picture of the rider did not fade. She recalled how easily he sat his horse, and what a distinguished figure he presented as he rode away, adjusting his cap over his flaxen hair.

She was impressed by the manner in which he got into the very heart of the town immediately. A few days later she saw him again, riding at a sharp canter along Main street in company with the wife of the General Manager of the railroad across the river. The General Manager's little girls, two in number,

were galloping behind on smaller horses, sitting astride and manifesting the happiest freedom of manner. It seemed that the wife of the General Manager was a sort of social monitor.

Before the week was out Fidesia had met the young man at a lawn party. She did not pretend not to remember him; and his eyes declared cheerfully, "Ah, here you are again!" They drew together like water escaping from the bottom of a bowl. They were both delighted. It seemed they had any number of things to talk about.

They met frequently after that: on the sidewalk as she went to or from school, at the post office, at parties. In a little town such meetings are inevitable and innocent. They danced together a good deal, and went riding together.

Whenever they met he drew the most sprightly pictures of his comings and goings on the border. He was almost childishly interested in everything that happened to him. He rode with the rangers and with the customs men up and down the river, on the alert for smugglers and "rustlers." There was no actual smuggling to be dealt with, it is true; but there were poor Mexicans who crossed the river, concealing small quantities of mescal in ingenious ways, or perhaps food for their own use, or trinkets to sell: ornaments of filigree silver, or Chinese silk, or Mexican opals. Occasionally an unruly or defiant Mexican was encountered.

These experiences he related to Fidesia, exaggerating them a little, perhaps. They did not impress her as thrilling episodes. Her sense of drama was more exacting. As for the poor Mexicans, she thought of them as pitiable persons who ought not to be judged severely because they were trying by childish means

to make a livelihood. But she liked to hear him talk. He manifested a certain distinction in his use of words, she thought. Besides, his lips were elfishly thin and assumed comic expressions easily, though she sensed an undercurrent of irony beneath his gaiety. His voice had a pleasant quality of insinuation; his eyes were the most beamingly expressive she had ever seen. Perhaps she had seen too much of somber men and ways. His happiness captivated her.

It was not long before he confided to her the fact that he could not live happily at home. His mother and father were continually disagreeing over questions of policy touching his future. His mother felt that he ought to be qualifying himself for a career; his father held that since he was not at all mischievous there was no reason why he should not have a good time.

"My mother is a very dear lady," he explained. "A lovely, fanciful creature who is forever making a play out of everything, and exaggerating things, and imagining them. Not really truthful, really—but untruthful in the interests of art. And when I fail to play up to her she gets into rages. I mean, when I set her right, or refuse to see things fantastically."

Fidesia gazed at him with candid amazement.

"My father used to play up to her until he got too old and busy," continued Ramon, "and then he quit. He understands just how I am placed. But she's the dearest and loveliest creature when she's good. That is, when the play is running smoothly." He added eagerly, "You're going to meet her some day. She'll be out here to look after me if I stay away from home long enough."

She asked him if he had no sisters.

He brought his hands together with an air of utter

abasement. "Didn't I say anything about Phoebe?" he demanded. "That's a shame. Of course there's Phoebe, a treasure above price. She's always there to save my life. She's really wonderful. She understands everything. She'll be coming out too, to chaperone our young mother. You'll certainly enjoy Phoebe."

He assumed a new attitude, as if everything he had said thus far had been merely introductory. "I don't believe I've met your mother," he said in a lower tone, a delicately serious manner.

"She is dead," replied Fidesia. She had a rather downright manner of speaking; her tones were round and full. She was then nearly seventeen.

"Oh—pardon me!" he said softly.

"I don't believe you've met my father either," she said, to efface the awkward memory of his words.

"Well, I certainly must," he said.

"He is Trinidad Valverde," explained Fidesia:

He had never heard the name, but his pleased manner stopped just short of incredulity. "Indeed!" he exclaimed; and then, "How stupid of me not to have guessed."

"He seldom leaves the ranch," she said.

"Then I'm going to ride out and get acquainted."

It was at this period that the new ranchhouse had been completed, with its great veranda all the front width of the structure, and its dark, substantial pillars. "Any time," she said. She believed she achieved precisely the correct degree of casualness.

The second Friday afternoon after that Fidesia heard the clatter of hoofs behind her as she rode home. She guessed without turning that it was Ramon. A moment later he checked his horse beside

hers. "I'm going home with you," he announced. He was quite radiant.

She was glad she had paved the way for something like this. She had mentioned the young man to her father more than once. She did not quite understand his taking everything for granted, but she could not help being glad that he had joined her.

They arrived at the ranchhouse like a whirlwind. "Is this the place?" he shouted to her. His eyes were shining.

A Mexican appeared to relieve Fidesia of her horse. Ramon flung his bridle to the man, who received it with a stare. It did not occur to Ramon that he might look after his own horse. The Mexican moved away morosely. It was his belief that all gringos had arrogant airs—all save Victoriano, who had arrived at the ranch earlier in the afternoon, and who, according to his custom, had put his own horse away, like a man.

Fidesia underwent a brief moment of trepidation at the last. What would her father say? A darker moment followed. What if Victoriano were about? What would Victoriano say?

Her father appeared on the veranda. His attitude was courteous, though his grisly hair and mustache seemed to bristle truculantly, and a furrow between his eyes deepened. He cast a penetrating glance at Ramon.

Ramon liked that. Fidesia's father was the real thing, he reflected. He went forward with eager respect when Fidesia introduced him.

"Greene?" said Valverde, repeating the name after Fidesia. "Not of Maverick County, I think?"

"Of Bexar County. Of San Antonio," said Ramon. He added casually, "My father is Jim Greene of the Alamo Bank."

The appraising expression in Valverde's eyes remained.

"President of the bank," added Ramon: not vain-gloriously, but quite as a matter of fact. To himself he added, "That ought to impress him."

But it did not, seemingly. "Will you sit down?" said Valverde, indicating a chair. Fidesia had disappeared into the house. Valverde sat down at a distance from his guest. "And you," he continued, "I suppose you are . . . ?"

"This is certainly fine," declared Ramon, breathing deeply. He looked out across the vast stretch of desert in which there was no sign of habitation save a feathery column of smoke marking the place where Padre Columbo's hut stood. "Magnificent! I? Why, I suppose I shall succeed my father in time." He met Valverde's glance and smiled.

"And be president of the bank?"

The youth's laughter was like an explosion. "No, indeed!" he said. "I haven't my father's ability."

Valverde smiled grimly at last. Something wholly candid in Ramon's manner struck him as novel. It was as if Fidesia had brought home one more American exhibit, like a pat phrase or a popular song.

Fidesia came out and sat down close to her father, lifting her skirts very slightly and permitting them to fall again. A Mexican girl appeared with something to drink. A big, awkward puppy escaped from somewhere and bounded out, sniffing at Ramon's legs, and then plunging at Fidesia. Temporary confusion followed the advent of the puppy. Fidesia clasped the ungainly creature's head and called out appealingly. Some one emerged from the house and induced the puppy to go away. Ramon glanced furtively at the wide front door, which seemed to him like a door in

a theater, through which everybody appears without any regard for logic.

The sun was setting; the desert was settling into the repose of dusk; the distant noises of the corral could be heard. Victoriano appeared.

There was an instant of constraint. Fidesia arose with ceremony and introduced Ramon to Victoriano.

It seemed that Victoriano was the commanding figure in the group for a moment. He put forth his hand slowly. He silently regarded the youth who was a stranger to him.

Ramon seemed scarcely to heed him for a moment. He gave his hand cordially enough, but as he did so he turned toward Valverde. "You have quite a little community here," he said amiably. He took his seat again and addressed Fidesia. "It's no wonder you always wanted Friday afternoon to come," he said. "I supposed you lived a lonely sort of life out here—and now I don't see how you could ever bear to leave it."

He sipped deliberately, elegantly, from the glass the woman servant had brought. It could be seen that his hand was delicate. He wore a jewel on his finger.

Valverde, looking away now, reflected: "A thoroughbred sort of cub, evidently." He arose. "We'll go in," he said. Inside the door he became less reserved; he made Ramon feel at home. And in the dining room, a little later, Ramon voiced his enthusiasm again: not as if he were surprised, but simply appreciative. The room was large and like an old inn, with dark rafters overhead, and a massive table and chairs of black wood. It was yet a little early to light the lamps. A cloister-like dusk, cool and restful, softened objects in the room.

It was the custom to eat in silence at Valverde's table, because there were seldom talkative persons there. Now, however, the host thought of ways of drawing Ramon out. He was interested in this latest of Fidesia's discoveries.

Fifteen minutes later Ramon became uneasily aware that he had been talking almost uninterruptedly—of his life in San Antonio and Austin, and later on the border. He checked himself with a sense of shame. He had talked too much, and with a certain loftiness, he feared. His eyes met Victoriano's.

His own glance fell. He felt obscurely that he was an alien, despite the formal welcome he had received. It was perhaps Victoriano who made him feel thus. But how? He sought Victoriano's eyes again; and meeting them, he said cordially, "I take it you are one of Mr. Valverde's neighbors—as neighbors are counted here?" He smiled with an almost humble plea for friendliness.

Fidesia hastily replied to the question. "Yes," she said, "and he's our best friend."

"I congratulate you," said Ramon, again addressing Victoriano. But he looked no more at Victoriano. Why seek to conciliate one who would scarcely speak? Yet the image of Victoriano's dark countenance, with its repose and power, took indelible form in his consciousness.

Strangely, Victoriano's presence and quality took first place in Valverde's consciousness too, after a time. The old Spaniard withdrew into himself gradually, and thought of Victoriano. That was the sort of son he should have liked to have. It seemed to him that Victoriano was the kind of man who would know how to meet life's disillusion in the right way:

tranquilly, courageously, always making the best of what remained.

Little by little Fidesia and Ramon began to speak in low tones, as if they were in the presence of strangers.

CHAPTER IV

HOW A STORM DESCENDS UPON THE HOUSE IN THE DESERT AND HOW A CRITICAL MOMENT IS MET

FIDESIA'S school days came to an end very soon after that and she had a triumphant home-coming, as we have seen. She was converted over-night—in seeming, at least—from a school girl to a young lady with lengthened skirts and a somewhat serious manner. She became the mistress of her father's house.

Since she appeared no more—or rarely—in Eagle Pass, Ramon fell into the habit of riding out to the ranch with but slight ceremony. It would have seemed that he came to see Trinidad Valverde quite as much as Fidesia. He spent hours with Valverde, riding or walking about the ranch. He became deeply interested in the irrigation plant the Spaniard had installed. His admiration of what had been achieved was in effect the most adroit flattery. Valverde found him amusing, yet he noted a certain manliness in him too. Beneath the youth's affability there was firmness, character. He wore with ease the manner of those born to authority.

He often met Victoriano at the Valverdes'. His manner toward Victoriano was admirable. He offered nicely-measured courtesy and respect and friendliness—but with an almost brisk implication that they might be accepted or let alone. It was a little difficult for him to conceal the annoyance he felt because Vic-

toriano's oddly masterful complacency was never disturbed. Victoriano too achieved an admirable manner. He seemed to be justly weighing Ramon—justly, and also with a measure of indifference. He had not yet accepted him. In the main he ignored him without seeming to be conscious of doing so. It would have seemed that he regarded Ramon as a harmless but insignificant person.

Ramon's mother and sister came out to Eagle Pass, just as he had predicted they would do. They established themselves at the Dolch Hotel. However, within forty-eight hours after their arrival Fidesia had succeeding in having them transferred to the ranch-house and made completely at home.

That pleased Valverde. That was why he had built the new house—that Fidesia might entertain her friends when she grew up. He displayed a quiet masterfulness in getting his daughter's guests installed comfortably in his house, and then he withdrew into a not too remote background.

Mrs. Greene became the center of attention from the moment she entered the house. She was gracious, but she was determined not to make any sacrifices. It was not wholly clear to her what sort of persons she was visiting. She began by living for herself. She accepted everything. And then she began to sense the quality of Trinidad Valverde and his daughter. She perceived that they were fine in every way. They desired nothing but her comfort and happiness. They calmly placed these well within her reach, after which they seemed disposed not to intrude upon her in any way.

She readjusted herself: where she had been simply gracious she became genuinely friendly. From wearing the air of a personage she became almost childlike

and lovely, eager to please and to be pleased. She was piqued by Valverde's unstudied aloofness. She tried to attract him. It did not seem to her that he was very old. She thought him splendid in his dark, foreign way. The easy formality of his manner delighted her. She wanted to discover where he had acquired that. She was certain he had had experiences in high places. She had the uncomfortable feeling that he could read her like a book: that he knew of her caprices and rages and pride, her instability and restlessness. She came near to losing her temper when she realized how very self-possessed he was.

She perceived suddenly that Fidesia was altogether lovely. She began to talk to her not in a matronly fashion, but as if they two were little girls. She displayed her dresses and ornaments; she began giving things to Fidesia. She would have given necklaces and rings and bracelets, even her watch. Fidesia chided her with lovely amazement and rejected everything save small keepsakes. They told each other secrets.

On the third day of her visit Mrs. Greene, sitting out on the veranda in a kind of nestling attitude, suddenly demanded of Fidesia: "Who is that gentleman?"

Fidesia, glancing up, perceived that the horseman who had just alighted was Victoriano. She summoned him. "I want you to know Ramon's mother," she said.

Victoriano mounted the veranda, regarding Mrs. Greene a little too studiously, perhaps. He had come with the intention of seeing what sort of relatives Ramon had. He had heard of their arrival. He wanted specially to see Ramon's mother. When he was introduced he greeted Mrs. Greene with a kind

of wondering manner which changed quickly to perfect gentleness. He knew almost nothing of various types of women, and here was a woman who was wholly strange to him. It was as if he had been brought into contact with a new kind of child. She was, indeed, the sort of woman who is always a child: a beautiful child in youth and a grotesque, almost tragic child in old age. She was small, of delicate features; her eyes were of a misty blue, her brows were sensitive, her complexion soft, her hair prettily unruly.

Victoriano wanted to laugh at her joyously; he wished this so much that he became quite grave. They became good friends instantly. She did not care at all that he had brought the odor of a horse with him and that his shirt was of gray flannel. The manner in which he wore his watch-chain atoned for everything, she thought—that and something wild and magnificent about him. On his part, he stole furtive glances at the almost incredibly fine things about her: the fabric of her dress, almost like cobweb, marvelously colored, and of a texture which seemed to share the life of her flesh and skin. He wanted to ask her what color that was. It made him think of witchcraft. There was the chain she wore, too. One could have placed a hundred yards of it in the hollow of one's palm. It also seemed alive. It wasn't jewelry. It was magic. It carried a locket of a wistful blue, like her eyes.

She inexplicably began to remove the locket, thrusting her chin into the soft flesh of her bosom that she might see. The locket evaded her. She captured it in a little hollow. "You were looking at my locket," she said. "It's quite inexpensive. Some kind of enamel. Put it on your watch-chain—do!"

He stared at her in amazement. "No," he said. She might almost as well have asked him to wear her dress.

Her face flamed. "I didn't expect to be insulted," she said, rising.

"Insulted, Ma'am!" he exclaimed.

"I never knew any one to be so rude in my life," she said. She was gone, scattering tokens as she went: an absurdly tiny handkerchief, a paper-knife, a magazine, a box of confections.

Fidesia gazed quietly after her. "She seems to have become undone," she said, with a glance at the tokens. "It would be easy to follow her, wouldn't it? I think that's what they expect." She stooped and began picking up things. She was the sort of person who never drops things. She arose with a flush. "Never mind, Victoriano," she said.

"I don't mind," he replied. He was smiling oddly. But it was Fidesia and not Victoriano who went with the tokens and sought to make peace with Mrs. Greene.

Victoriano's interest in Ramon was stimulated rather than lessened by the behavior of Ramon's mother. Ramon was expected at the ranchhouse that evening. There was to be music. And when Ramon arrived he was interested to note that Victoriano was less reserved than usual. Victoriano and Ramon and Valverde sat on the veranda and listened to the music.

It had developed that Phoebe, Ramon's sister, possessed a wholly unusual voice, at once powerful and musical. She had brought an old-fashioned song folio filled with such songs as *The Blue Alsatian Mountains* and *Twickenham Ferry* and *We'd Better Bide a' Wee*. She could not play for herself. She stood almost stolidly beside Fidesia at the piano, turning the pages and singing. She was quite prodigal in the use of her

voice. It was as if she did not realize how beautiful it was. She was a rather sad young woman with a dull complexion and a habit of glancing uneasily at her mother from time to time. She seemed never to have been young, really. Her mother was now in the room with them, listening to the music. She liked the music for itself, and she always felt her heart swell and her lips quiver when she listened to the romantic stories related in the songs. She would have liked to go out to the veranda where the men were, but she felt that she had acted badly during the day.

On the veranda Trinidad Ververde and Victoriano were recalling the exploits of certain famous hunters of West Texas.

Ramon broke into these reminiscences. "Hunting wild javelinas—that's the thing," he declared, perhaps too authoritatively.

Valverde and Victoriano were silent a moment; and then Victoriano, regarding Ramon curiously in the dim light cast from an inside lamp, remarked: "I suppose you'd care for that kind of hunting yourself?"

"Can you give me the chance?" retorted Ramon challengingly.

"Yes," said Victoriano quietly. "To-morrow. If you like, we'll go out to my place to-morrow. It's generally easy to find a herd of wild hogs out there."

Ramon detected no covert intention. He broke out enthusiastically, gratefully. "It's the very thing I've been hoping for!" he exclaimed. Figuratively he enveloped Victoriano with his delight and good will.

Together they rode out to the Shreve ranch the next day. Ramon was enraptured by the primitive, wild life of the ranch. He rode with Victoriano fif-

teen miles without reaching the outer bounds of the Shreve estate. In a region of indescribable barrenness and tragic grandeur—among rocky eminences and cañons and caves—the wild javelinas were found. Half a score of dogs which had followed them out from the ranchhouse scented the quarry in a cave.

A fire was built at the mouth of the cave, the dogs were held back. Ramon, mounted and with his revolver in his hand, was stationed near the mouth of the cave. Said Victoriano: "They'll be coming out before long. They'll run like the wind. You'll have to be quick. I'll go down into the arroyo to be ready for them if they come that way."

Ramon could not help feeling that he formed part of a spectacular picture as he sat his horse outside the cave. He was rather high up above the surrounding territory. A dangerously steep incline lay between him and the arroyo into which Victoriano had descended. Far away there were blue peaks, an infinity of barren wilderness.

There was a shadow-like movement about the mouth of the cave; the dogs whimpered anxiously. The javelinas appeared like bolts: they tore down the steep incline, followed and engulfed by the dogs. Ramon fired once; and then his horse wheeled frantically and plunged down the dangerous incline. The revolver in Ramon's hand left a trail of smoke behind. A gaunt dead limb depending from a mesquite tree plucked his hat from his head and held it. He was too dazed to realize all that happened. He clung instinctively to his horse. By nothing short of a miracle horse and rider made the foot of the incline without falling. The horse, a veteran of the chase, tore down the arroyo after Victoriano's horse. It veered aside dangerously when a particularly high clump of cactus appeared

ahead; it leaped over the lesser clumps with undiminished speed.

For a time Victoriano was lost in the excitement of the hunt; but soon he began to regard Ramon critically. Ramon was urging his horse on now, until it seemed he would run down the hounds. In a pocket in the arroyo the javelinas were temporarily cornered. Here a gaunt and ferocious tusked boar turned and attacked the dogs. It had maimed one of the dogs when Ramon lifted his revolver again. There was an echoing report and the boar turned in a rage, abandoning the hound—and dropped dead. The other javelinas had escaped from the pocket and were gone. In the distance the baying of the hounds was heard, echoing among the rocks.

Victoriano came up to where Ramon was examining the maimed hound. He was paying no attention to the tusked boar which lay stretched out in a running attitude. "You did very well," he said.

Ramon looked back the way he had come, an incredulous expression in his eyes. He smiled delightedly when he saw his hat impaled on the dead mesquite limb.

Late in the evening they rode together toward the Valverde ranch. Ramon was inclined to be exultant, heartily friendly. But little by little Victoriano fell silent. He became somberly thoughtful, almost moody. He would have seemed to be a guide rather than a friend. He rode a little behind—it was not always practicable for two to ride abreast—and withdrew into himself completely. Perhaps he was merely himself here on the trail. He was silent by nature and had never conquered his natural inclination.

Toward sunset they fell in with two rangers known

to Ramon; and as a result of this they took what was called the river road on their way home, that Ramon might ride with the rangers. Ramon began to talk to them exuberantly. "I'll be one of you—nearly—in a week or so," he said. "I've been appointed a customs guard. One of the mounted force." He turned to Victoriano to explain: "That was to please the mother," he said with an air of confidence. "She thought I ought to get into something."

Victoriano nodded a little darkly. It seemed to him that Ramon was asserting himself somewhat surprisingly. He came to the conclusion that he had certainly underrated Ramon.

That day had been a rather trying one for Fidesia. There were indications that Mrs. Greene was going to be bad, as her son would have said. She did not agree with any statement that was made to her. She seemed determined not to be pleased with anything that was done for her. This in itself would have put a strain upon Fidesia, but the behavior of Phoebe, the daughter, was even more taxing. Phoebe, whose really strong character was veiled by an anxious meekness, was evidently fearful that her mother was in for one of her bad days, and she could not conceal her distress at the thought that this should happen while they were guests. She watched her mother furtively—she listened furtively—for evidences of an outburst. She was evidently prepared to check such an outburst before it got out of hand. She had become highly expert in this. She knew how to change a subject without arousing her mother's suspicions, and precisely to what extent to acquiesce when her mother declared that she had been slighted or insulted or otherwise injured. She dreaded these outbursts

of her mother's the more because she knew better than any one else how painful was the remorse which followed them.

As evening approached Fidesia concluded that Phoebe and her mother would be better alone, and she announced that she meant to ride out toward the Quemado a mile or two to meet Victoriano and Ramon. She rode away at a gallop. She could have shouted with joy because of the uneasiness and constraint she was now rid of.

Victoriano and Ramon arrived before she had been gone long, riding up through the ranch from the direction of the river. They had put their horses away before they were informed that Fidesia had gone to meet them.

Valverde would not permit them to go in search of her. "At least, not until after you have eaten," he said. He observed that Ramon was exhausted, but blissful; while Victoriano was more silent than ever.

After the two had eaten their supper they entered the great front room which always served as a gathering place when the veranda was for any reason uninviting. Just now there were little flurries of wind and sand outside; and besides it had come time to light the lamps. Mrs. Greene and Phoebe were seated rather close together, not unlike patient and nurse, and Valverde sat at a distance: too far away to seem to intrude, yet not too far away to be of service if opportunity arose.

"She's not here yet," said Ramon to Victoriano. He seemed disappointed. He drew a chair close to his mother's and began gazing at her searchingly, perhaps a trifle accusingly.

Victoriano had not replied to him. Instead, a detached expression in his eyes gave place to an expres-

sion of alarm. His body stiffened. He was the first of the group to note that some evil impended.

Immediately, servants rushed into the room without ceremony. They began closing everything: the front windows, the door. They brought an air of bustling merriment with them, but they were plainly excited also.

Ramon's eyes followed them keenly and then sought Valverde's for an explanation.

"A norther," said Valverde briefly. To Victoriano the matter was too obvious to require comment. Throughout the house there was the sound of doors and windows closing, of excited hurrying to and fro. A moment later wind struck the house with the force of a battering ram. The walls groaned and trembled.

Ramon followed Valverde to one of the front windows. Victoriano took his place at another window. The scene without was indescribably wild. Gigantic streamers of powdered dust were advancing before a demoniac wind. The sky was blotted out. Little by little the earth was engulfed in the swirling sand, which seemed to fill the universe. A servant entered the room with another lamp. At intervals the house rocked and groaned; a great roaring and hissing sound enveloped it.

Ramon stepped back from the window with a dawning sense of uneasiness. A question had arisen in his mind: What would happen to Fidesia?

He was perplexed to note that Valverde and Victoriano were no longer in the room. Under cover of the noise of the storm they had withdrawn.

He paused only long enough to say to his mother and sister: "You'll not be alarmed, will you?" and then he went in search of the others. He came upon

one of the women servants. "Where is Mr. Valverde?" he asked.

"I think they went out to see about the horses," the woman replied.

He felt annoyed that he had not anticipated this, that he had not gone with the other men. He realized that Victoriano would not have had to be reminded of the horses or requested to go to look after them. Then he thought again of Fidesia. Where would she find shelter? Was she not, perhaps, in great peril?

He rushed from the house in the general direction of the corral and stables, both now invisible. He was shocked to note how cold the wind was. The powdered dust and sand swirled about him, stinging him, blinding him. He could scarcely see his hand before him. A gust of the tempest thrust him forward so violently that he would have fallen, had he not encountered an obstacle. He had collided with Valverde, who, with head down and eyes all but closed, was beating back into the house. He grasped Ramon by the arm, indicating by a pressure that they were both to seek cover. If he spoke, the howling of the wind drowned his voice.

Inside the house Ramon began excitedly: "Fidesia . . . ?"

Valverde frowned. "I've been thinking of her, of course," he said. He seemed annoyed rather than alarmed. He flung his sombrero from him. He seemed on the point of speaking further, but checked himself. Ramon's impression was that Valverde had been about to utter some sort of complaint. Certainly Valverde was taking the matter pretty calmly.

"Isn't she in danger?" Ramon ventured to ask.

The Spaniard shook his head. "It's not that bad. She's been caught in a norther before. She will know

what to do. She knows every foot of ground for miles around. She'll find an arroyo to shelter herself in, or rocks to hide behind. She'll make a cover of her riding-habit."

But all this only served to confirm Ramon's fears. He was surprised that Valverde could be so calm. He stared at him an instant. "Where's Victoriano?" he asked. He had decided that something must be done: a search party organized—he scarcely knew what. He recalled his own helplessness in the wind a moment before, and his face lost color.

"He went to the stables," replied Valverde. "He may stay awhile."

Ramon turned away from him, moving toward one of the windows again. But there was nothing to be seen. He might have been staring at a concrete wall, save that the sand-cloud ebbed and flowed a little, revealing at intervals a partly open space.

It seemed to him that he could not endure the thought of being inactive an instant longer. And then relief came in a strange manner. The front door opened. An old man entered the room, immediately followed by Victoriano. Both turned and placed their weight against the door, forcing it shut. The shrieking of the storm, which had arisen loudly, subsided as the door went to.

Victoriano moved silently aside while the old man approached Valverde, slowly unwinding a kind of scarf from his face as he did so. Sand which had lodged in the folds of his scarf fell about him. He presented a strange spectacle: the calmness of eternity seemed to cling to him, though he had come out of the storm as if he were its creature.

Mrs. Greene gazed at him with awe, her hands clasped, her brows delicately furrowed. She was

startled when Valverde cried out in a genial tone—"Ah, Padre Columbo!"

"Your daughter—she is quite safe," said the old man. He smiled. "The storm overtook her and my roof was nearer than her own. She took refuge with me."

"Quite right," said Valverde cordially. His manner was merely conventionally polite. But Ramon, standing apart, gazed fixedly at the old man whose apparition had been so strange, so dramatic. He had not known that any one dwelt within miles of the ranchhouse. He was also considering Victoriano's unexpected arrival with the old man. He took a step forward.

"Please tell me—how did you get here?" he asked in a low tone. He was appraising the fine, tranquil face which was now turned toward him. Padre Columbo was smiling at him with a faint, ambiguous kindness, and he added, "It is impossible to see one's way!"

Perfect silence reigned in the room for an instant, and then the old man, without ceasing to smile strangely, said, "Sometimes one is enabled to move by the aid of an inner light."

An assault as of a thousand battering rams smote the house so that it trembled in all its parts.

Ramon's brow darkened with perplexity. What did the old man mean? That he possessed supernatural powers? Absurd! His meaning was, doubtless, that he knew the way so intimately that his feet guided him when his eyes might not. The inner light, in such an event, would be memory. But the cloud did not lift from his brow as he turned to Victoriano with an inquiring glance.

If Victoriano comprehended the meaning of that

glance he gave no sign. It was Padre Columbo who replied for the young man: "Victoriano had ventured forth to seek Fidesia. I encountered him by chance. I induced him to return with me."

To Victoriano Ramon said with warm reproach: "At least, you might have spoken to me, so that I could have gone with you!"

Victoriano replied candidly: "It's not every one who can move about in a norther. I've been out in them before. And I knew the way."

There was no trace of triumph or contempt in the response; yet Ramon realized that in a way he and Victoriano had been placed on trial, and that the day had gone to Victoriano.

CHAPTER V

HOW RAMON IS PRIVILEGED TO CARRY A WEAPON AND HOW IT NEARLY BETRAYS HIM

It was Victoriano who went to bring Fidesia home after the storm subsided. He managed this with a certain wilfulness which left no opportunity for any one else to perform the task or to share it with him. It seemed that he knew precisely when the storm had spent itself, and he set out for Padre Columbo's without a word.

His state of mind had undergone something like a complete transformation during the day and evening. He had made two discoveries: one, that Ramon was in the way of falling in love with Fidesia, if he had not already done so; the other, that he was a youth of such unquestionable merit that his suit might very well be considered favorably. And these discoveries had brought with them a condition of sharp unrest. He had long accustomed himself to think of Fidesia as beyond his reach; and now he realized that he had not been wholly sincere in this, or at least, that he had not considered the matter thoroughly. She would want a man some day. That was the destiny of a normal woman. And why not himself as well as another?

There was a good deal of noise and chatter when he brought her home. Mrs. Greene and Phoebe and

Ramon all wanted to know just what had happened. They sat in the living room talking excitedly. They went over every detail repeatedly. Mrs. Greene wanted to know about the old man with the strange eyes. It seemed to her the wildest adventure for a young girl to find refuge in an old Mexican's hut. Ramon was scarcely less interested in this part of the story. He asked a great many questions. And at last he discovered that it was time for him to go back to his hotel.

He observed that Valverde and Victoriano were sitting on the veranda speaking in low tones as he went away. The fact impressed him uncomfortably. What were they talking about, as if it was a secret? He experienced a kind of fear of Victoriano. Why should any man be so reserved? He feared he had made a mistake in remaining inside with the women, sharing their excitement, instead of joining the men on the veranda. He thought he detected a faint irony in Valverde's polite "Good-night."

As a matter of fact Valverde and Victoriano had talked but little during the hour they had sat on the veranda alone. That was one of the proofs of the genuine bond between them, that they could sit a long time silent yet comfortable. They were not unlike in a number of essentials; they were most alike in the fact that they took no delight in the employment of words. The sources of their pleasure ran deeper.

But after Ramon was gone and the clatter of his horse's hoofs had grown faint, Valverde altered the position of his chair and cleared his throat. He began to speak of a matter which had interested and even troubled him for a long time. He said somewhat casually: "Fidesia seems to have become quite a woman all of a sudden. You've noticed it?"

"Yes," said Victoriano.

There was an interval of silence, not at all comfortable in this instance, and then Valverde continued: "I've somehow had the impression that sooner or later you and Fidesia would come to some sort of understanding . . ."

Victoriano reflected: "He's been noticing Ramon too." He said aloud: "I've hoped we might." He altered the position of his chair noisily.

"And—do things seem to be going all right?"

"I can't say anything's gone wrong," said Victoriano slowly.

It was difficult for Valverde to go on. He had hoped that if he announced the text Victoriano would take up the burden of the discourse. He frowned slightly and finally added: "You'd not have any doubt, I think, about how I'd feel if you were to—to arrive at an understanding with her?"

"As to that," said Victoriano, "I suppose that whatever suited Fidesia would suit you."

"That's right. Yes, that puts it clearly."

But still Victoriano failed to go forward voluntarily.

"I believe," continued Valverde, his voice betraying his perplexity, "that it's not unusual for American girls to wait until they are well past twenty before they think of marriage. But you know Fidesia comes of a race that develops earlier."

He could say no more. It had cost him an effort to say so much. Yet Victoriano seemed unready to speak his mind. However, he was weighing something, and Valverde waited.

"You know," said Victoriano at last, "I've always been ready for Fidesia—any way you can take the words. She never could have helped knowing I like

to do things for her, to see her have whatever she wants. That's my position now—to the limit. There's some things I haven't felt like saying to her. It wouldn't have seemed quite right or fair, somehow; and besides, we know each other pretty well. I'd not want to force myself on her, or to overpersuade her. It might be you could, you know. She's generous. But she seems to see a lot in Ramon; and I'd want her to be sure she'd not rather have Ramon than me. It would be bad for both of us—for everybody—if she took me and found out later that she ought to have taken Ramon." He paused; and presently he concluded decisively: "Fidesia has got a lot of sense. Sometimes I think she has more sense than any one else I know. I think she can be trusted to do the right thing. I'd rather risk it, anyway. If she wants Ramon it wouldn't do for me to interfere. If she decides he's not the man for her—why, then I'm here."

It seemed to Trinidad Valverde that that was the way an old man might talk about choosing a friend—not as a young man should talk about winning a wife. He said dryly: "You said you'd not want to overpersuade her. You said 'You could, you know.' You can. Women are like that, if you go about it right. And suppose Ramon should overpersuade her? He's no scrub, you know: money, a good family—all that."

"How, a good family?" asked Victoriano crisply.

Valverde feared he had blundered. He continued: "Besides, that isn't the way it's done."

"The way what's done?"

"Why, the winning of a girl."

"I can't say I'm out to win her," said Victoriano. "That sounds like you might be playing poker. That's not the way I think about Fidesia. I want to be

the right man for her. I want her to see that. That's about as far as I'd care to go."

"And tell you she wants you?" Valverde's tone was a little scornful.

"She'd not have to tell me. She'd just have to cut loose from Ramon a little and stand out in the open."

The next morning Mrs. Greene decided—and announced coldly—that she intended to return to San Antonio immediately.

This seemed a little surprising, and her daughter Phoebe had to seem slightly surprised, though she was not really surprised. It was plain to her that her mother was in for one of her bad spells. She said a little sadly, "Very well, mother." They were alone for the moment. Valverde had gone away toward the river after breakfast and Fidesia was in the kitchen.

Mrs. Greene's color began to rise; there was a tempestuous and wilful expression in her eyes and about her lips. She seemed to be controlling herself by an effort. She was choosing her share of the dialogue in the scene she meant to bring about. She said presently: "Mr. Valverde isn't a gentleman."

Phoebe said again, "Very well, mother."

Mrs. Greene brought her hands together sharply. "Why don't you ask me why he isn't a gentleman?" she demanded furiously.

Phoebe quailed and cast about for her part. She said: "Well, mother: why isn't he a gentleman?"

"His manner toward me since the moment I entered the house has been an insult. What I took to be reticence is a subtle method of slighting me. He is considering, every moment of the day, how he can make me uncomfortable. You're very stupid if you don't see it for yourself."

Phoebe said: "It's a shame. He might so easily have shown you a little attention."

But it seemed that Mrs. Greene was not pleased by this ready acquiescence. She cast a baleful and thwarted glance at Phoebe and turned her back. However, she permitted her thought of going home to get the upper hand of her, and before she could gracefully change front she had settled the point by informing Valverde and Fidesia that she must go home.

Valverde was again silently masterful in looking after his guests' comfort—in making preparations for their departure—and then he moved somberly into the background, not unlike an ambassador in the presence of a queen. It seemed to Mrs. Greene, as she went away, that he was really an admirable person.

As for Phoebe, she was very glad to go. She had taken a great liking to the Valverdes in her undemonstrative way, and she shrank from having her mother amaze and distress them by one of her tantrums. Moreover, she had perceived that her brother admired Fidesia very greatly. It even seemed to her that Ramon was in love. And she couldn't bear to have her mother spoil things for people who had been so generous and well-behaved. They went away after lunch, in time for the early afternoon train back to San Antonio.

Ramon got wind of their departure somehow and made his appearance dutifully at the railway station. He glanced inquiringly at Phoebe: Had their mother been at it again? And Phoebe replied by a kind of washed-out manner: Yes. There were three Mexicans in peaked hats and wearing gipsy-like colors standing in the sun outside the waiting-room door, but otherwise the Greens were alone. It seemed the train was late. Ramon gazed into space a moment; then he as-

sumed control of his eyes and moved them furtively so that he could observe his mother again. She was now preternaturally serene. He impulsively took her hand into both his. She couldn't help it! She was a perfectly dear creature in spite of it all. He said proudly: "You know I'm going to work for the government, mother." Her face trembled slightly. She understood everything. "You're a good son, Ramon," she said. She winked hard because of tears.

"I knew you were right about wanting me to do something. You're nearly always right, mother. You're so nearly always right that it's good to see you a little wrong once in awhile." He patted her hand slowly.

"Don't, Ramon!" she said. "I know I don't deserve it. I *am* proud of you. I'll come out again to see you on your horse, collecting taxes—or whatever it is you do."

He smiled at Phoebe. "Not collect taxes!" he said in a horrified tone. "Just ride, and see that no smuggling's done. Really heroic looking, you know."

He glanced at Phoebe again and jerked his head almost imperceptibly. She arose and strolled away to a railroad map on the wall.

Ramon said in an abashed yet impetuous tone: "Mother—what do you think of Fidesia?"

She sighed blissfully, all her troubles forgot. She was in for what she loved best of all, her specialty: an emotional drama into which she could put her whole heart and which need not leave her with a guilty feeling in the end. "She is a lady," she said. "She is a dear girl."

"I'm so glad you think so!" said Ramon, his color rising with the joy he felt. "I wanted so much that you should like her."

It pleased his mother to assume that everything was settled, that there was a perfect understanding. "I've seen it all," she said. "I won't say I shall not feel regret at losing you, in a sense. But I shall be happy because she is such a lovely girl."

He was carried away by her assumed assurance; he took his cue from her. "I am certainly glad you feel that way about it," he said. He could scarcely command his emotions sufficiently to say more. He realized clearly that he was hopelessly in love with Fidesia.

A baggage man began moving stormily about on the platform, pushing a truck that was high in the middle and low at both ends. The Greenes' baggage was on the truck. There was an inrush of persons. The train was coming. Confusion reigned a moment or two and then the train was gone and Ramon stood alone on the platform.

He had told his mother that he had been appointed a customs guard. That was quite true; but he had had only an unofficial notification as yet. His formal appointment came to him in an unstamped official envelope that day in the late afternoon mail. He knew what was in the envelope, yet he would not open it in the hotel lobby. He hid away on an upper balcony where he was alone. He read the words of the appointment with bounding pulses. He replaced the appointment in its envelope and sat gazing away before him. There was the river, and the bridge, and beyond, Mexico, with its white-washed Cuartel with pennons flying from it, and the unfinished Cathedral, and here and there a turreted housetop, or a dome. It was like a Bible picture. It was all strange, impressive, romantic. His work had to do with that city over there, with its bringing forward of Moorish forms and at-

mosphere. He thrilled with eagerness. He drew his appointment from its envelope and read it again. He descended to the street and hurried with an air of importance which he could not wholly subdue away in the direction of the Custom House. He stood in the street a moment and then climbed the outside staircase ascending to the upper offices of the Collector of the Port. It was after office hours, he realized, and it would be only by chance if he succeeded in finding even the janitor. But it seemed unthinkable not to carry the good news of his appointment to certain of the veteran guards with whom he had spent many a mildly adventurous day. It seemed good to approach the Custom House, now that he was part of the machinery it represented.

Two veteran mounted men were lingering in the general offices gossiping. The low sun filled the room with an atmosphere of repose; and the two inspectors sat with their heels on a table, smoking and resting.

When Ramon entered the room they brought their heels to the floor with a clatter. They were the most democratic of men at heart; but in the presence of Jim Greene's son they would not have been comfortable with their heels in the air. They professed eagerness to see the official appointment. They made much over it, wholly because he was so childishly pleased. They ventured to give him fatherly advice. It would be a different matter, they reminded him—riding on his own hook, as he would be expected to do now, and going along with them as a guest, as he had done in the past. They wanted to know if he should use Selim, his thoroughbred.

It seemed that one of the veterans had an old holster, and the other an extra revolver. These were offered to Ramon until he could provide his own equipment. He

accepted the offer with delight. To carry the weather-beaten trappings belonging to veterans—how much more thrilling than to carry untried articles of his own choosing! He did not rest until he had got the holster and the revolver and had strapped them about him. His exuberant pleasure scarcely sprung from the fact that he was now warranted in carrying a weapon no matter where he went. There was nothing of the bully in him. But the revolver and holster were a symbol of service—the sign by which the world might now know that he was a placed man. He was now a member of the community in the completest sense.

Still, he could not conceal from himself the fact that it seemed just a little dashing to go about wearing a weapon. Such a thing was common enough along the border; but he was city-bred.

He was wearing his holster and revolver when, a little after sundown, he rode out of the town on the splendid Selim. He rode toward the Valverdes', of course, to tell Fidesia—and Trinidad Valverde—how his written appointment had arrived and his official career begun.

It chanced that on that day Victoriano had also been engaged in a somewhat exciting task. The month was November and the cattle ranges, after affording a diminishing supply of sustenance for the dumb creatures roaming over them, had become almost entirely barren. Even the supply of mesquite twigs was exhausted and the cattle had been driven to seek relief from hunger in the sprawling nests of cactus with their tiny, penetrating spines which caused them inevitable misery sooner or later. The helpless beasts were beginning to stand with their muzzles extended, uttering mournful cries, because their tongues were swollen and feverish and their hunger unappeased.

Victoriano had decided upon a course which was not uncommon in those years. He had assembled his cattle and driven them into Eagle Pass, confining them in the stockade adjoining the railroad tracks. They were to be sent to pastures far to the east, where the rains had not failed and where pasturage was yet abundant. It was scarcely a profitable way out of a dilemma; yet such cattle as survived the journey would be assured of relief, if they were not permitted to founder themselves at the outset.

It was one of Victoriano's traits—one of his limitations, perhaps—that he rarely thought of financial gains. To do his best by his cattle, and to be ready when the tax collector came—these were his chief aims. He loved life, but in a primitive, almost reclusive way.

After his last trip to the stockade in Eagle Pass—after all the cattle were cared for, so far as he could care for them—he drew up at the Valverde ranch on his way home. He was a little down-hearted, as a man might be who had parted with a company of friends. It is true that he scarcely knew his cattle one from another: there were too many of them, and they ranged too far and were seen too seldom. But the herd taken as a whole afforded him all the society he had much of the time, and it was one of his solaces in lonely seasons to look out across the desert plains and realize that the creatures of his care were out yonder, browsing their way along the skyline, appearing and disappearing in the arroyos where a little moisture yet remained, and patiently abiding in their place.

He tethered his horse to a post in front. He did not mean to remain long. He was tired and dispirited. He heard Fidesia playing on the piano and he sat down

on the veranda to listen. She would be coming out presently, he thought; or Valverde would appear. He did not know that the Spaniard had ridden away toward the river and would not return for an hour or so.

Fidesia continued to play musingly; and then she stopped with a startling abruptness, with a shattered end of harmony.

What had happened was simple enough, though Victoriano could at first make no guess. Ramon, sitting beside Fidesia—he had arrived at the ranchhouse half an hour earlier—had suddenly reached out and seized Fidesia's hand in his own. "Stop, Fidesia!" he cried in a voice which vibrated, though he had spoken almost in a whisper. "There's something I must say to you!"

Victoriano felt a wave of heat engulf him. In all his life he had never experienced so disturbing a sensation. He knew—without knowing how he knew—that the drama in which he himself was intimately if silently engaged had reached a climax. Ramon was about to force a decision.

His first thought was that he ought not to listen to what must now be said—that he could not bear to listen. Yet it seemed difficult to go away. His footsteps on the veranda, if he moved, would startle the persons inside the house; and he shrank from stealthy movement. After all, what could he hear that he did not already know? Ramon could only say that he was in love—could only ask if his love was returned. Still, he could not bear to be in the position of an eavesdropper, and he might have gone away in a moment; but while he hesitated Ramon spoke.

He could not hear all that Ramon said, but he heard

every word of Fidesia's reply. "You startled me!" she said, and there was a note of dismay in her voice.

"And yet," said Ramon, "you must have guessed for a long time that I love you?"

"No . . ." was Fidesia's faltering reply.

Victoriano's heart cast off half its load. He had been right, then. Fidesia had *not* meant her friendship for Ramon to be accepted as a sign of preference. He leaned forward, his hands clasped so powerfully that the blood deserted them, his eyes fixed with a marveling, almost incredulous expression upon the floor.

Silence inside the house for a space. Fidesia was striving to regain her self-possession. Ramon was trying to think of some special plea to make. His voice arose again, waveringly, pleadingly: "I'm sure your father would approve, if you thought you could care for me."

Victoriano moved suddenly. It seemed for an instant that he would spring to his feet. That was not true! It couldn't be true.

"My father would wish me to decide for myself," said Fidesia.

Victoriano relaxed a little. That was a fact, of course. He was calmed by Fidesia's voice. She was in that sweetly reasonable mood which he knew very well.

"Then, Fidesia—Fidesia—tell me that you love me a little—that you're willing to love me . . ." There was a jarring discord on the piano, as if he had sought to recapture her hand. Ramon had been carried off his feet. "You know there's no one in the world who loves you as I do——"

Victoriano arose. He heard Fidesia pleading softly—"Don't, Ramon!" She seemed in distress. He moved quickly toward the door. His tense figure

appeared suddenly before them. He spoke in an almost casual tone to Ramon, who was just releasing Fidesia's hand.

"You remarked just now that there was no one in the world that loves her as you do. I'm here to say you're wrong there!"

Ramon sprang to his feet, passionately angry, helplessly embarrassed.

"You've said your say," continued Victoriano. "You've put it plain enough. Your next move is to let her make up her mind. It's up to her, now."

"You've been eavesdropping," said Ramon.

"No; I just happened to hear what you said. By accident."

"Very well, then; you're intruding." He spoke sharply, in a tone of condescension, of forbearance. "Later you may say what you please to Fidesia, but at present she is engaged."

As he spoke he perceived for the first time a startling expression of ferocity in Victoriano's eyes—a terrible expression wholly at variance with his calm voice. He lost his head for the moment—a confusion of conceptions guided him. A subconscious thought of his newly-acquired dignity influenced him. Without fully realizing what he did he drew his weapon from its holster.

He was stunned by what instantly transpired. Victoriano bent to a crouching attitude with incredible swiftness. He darted forward, seizing from beneath Ramon's hand and the weapon it held. He forced the hand upward with a fierce thrust. He wrenched the revolver out of Ramon's paralyzed fingers. Then he sprang back, his whole being flashing fierce defiance and triumph.

It was Fidesia who awakened him from his wild

mood. Her voice arose passionately: "Shame on you—both!"

They forgot each other, seemingly. They turned toward Fidesia. Ramon was the first to speak.

"Forgive me," he said humbly.

She regarded him intently for an instant; then her glance moved to Victoriano. But he remained dumb, giving back her fixed gaze.

"An apology wouldn't be out of place, Victoriano," she said.

He could not understand why he should apologize. What had he done that his own heart condemned? Why use words idly, in a pretty and fashionable sense, if they meant nothing? "He had no business to draw," he said, not quite defiantly, but steadily.

"You're right," said Ramon. "It was cheap. I forgot myself."

Victoriano again regarded Fidesia steadily—as if Ramon had said all that required saying.

She stepped forward and took the weapon from his hand. She turned to Ramon almost absentmindedly. "You have no need of a weapon in this house," she said. "There are none but gentlemen here, unless—unless I am mistaken in you, as I do not think I am. Put it away."

She placed the weapon in his hand, observing him steadily. His hand trembled as he hurriedly replaced the revolver in its holster. He turned away with haggard eyes. "Good-night," he said.

She watched him go. Then she turned to Victoriano.

"Maybe I'd better go too," he said.

"No," she said, "not just now."

"You needn't be afraid I'll harm him," he said, gazing at her searchingly.

"I don't want him to hurt you," she replied.

His lips twitched, and then his eyes beamed. "Don't you, Fidesia?" he said. The color came back to his face in a flood. "Wouldn't you want him to harm me, Fidesia?" he repeated.

She listened until she heard the beat of Ramon's horse's hoofs dying away in the night. Then she turned to Victoriano with a faint frown. "You'll excuse me," she said in an almost lifeless voice. "Good-night."

CHAPTER VI

HOW TRINIDAD VALVERDE HEARS A CALL AND HOW THE HOUSE IN THE DESERT BECOMES DESOLATE

THE next day was a difficult one for Fidesia. It seemed to her that she ought to tell her father about the clash between Victoriano and Ramon, yet she shrank from doing so. There was much in that affair which he might not clearly understand, she thought. She was glad that he gave her no opportunity. He seemed preoccupied; he was very busy. They were putting in a new pumping station down by the river and things were not going well.

She hoped—yet feared—to see Victoriano or Ramon—or both—during the day; but she saw neither. As a matter of fact, Victoriano was laboriously employed about the stockade in Eagle Pass. The cattle were going away. He was unpresentable at the end of the day and he went home without drawing rein at the Valverdes'. And Ramon was being formally inducted into the paths of his new task. He was drawing solace from earnest application to this. He was deeply mortified over his misbehavior of the night before. To himself, at least, he was trying to make amends.

That was the day of Fidesia's visit to Padre Columbo, when he had related the story of the Aztec princess and the manner in which she had made a difficult choice.

Even after her return from Padre Columbo's hut she had not found herself ready to confess to her father the burden which was on her mind. She thought rather of the things the old seer had said. She was inclined to wish that Padre Columbo had not employed figures of speech; yet she was not certain. It was possible to think longer about a matter when it was a little obscure, she reflected. One could get more out of it. But the next morning after breakfast she said to her father: "You didn't know that there was a little trouble between Victoriano and Ramon, did you?"

He did not know. When? Here in his house? His brow darkened, his penetrating gaze did not leave her.

She gave him details.

"And Ramon drew his weapon?" he asked harshly.

When she inclined her head, her eyes avoiding his, he added with grim relish, "And Victoriano took it away from him?"

She resented her father's interpretation. "It's not really as bad as it appears," she said with a judicious air. "Ramon behaved childishly—that's all. He's been excited about his new position. It seems a great thing to him. And you can't blame him for that: the first thing he's ever done, really. He wasn't himself for the moment."

Her father changed the position of his chair; he regarded her dubiously. "Childishly—yes," he said. "And how do you think Victoriano behaved?"

"Very well," she said. "He needn't have been so angry. Still, that was natural." She reflected a moment. "They're so different," she continued. "Victoriano knows what a gun means. It's not a thing to make gestures with. He's learned that among the men he knows. Ramon has lived among people that don't know anything about guns."

Valverde smiled grimly. "He's probably seen them in plays," he remarked.

Fidesia did not know about that. "And he apologized like a gentleman," she said.

That did not seem to signify greatly, to Valverde. It seemed to him that words have only to do with superfcials. You have to judge a man by what he does, he held. A knave may master the elegant forms and uses of speech. It is like learning to sing correctly.

She seemed to read part of what was in his mind. "The best of men blunder," she declared; "and they have to begin seeking pardon by asking for it."

But already he had ceased to listen to her. Certain decadent forces in his character made discussion of any kind a futile thing to him. He fell into a muse. He yielded almost with a sense of luxury to a heavy mood. Soon he arose with an air of having forgotten something. He had a great deal of exacting work to do that day.

He went away toward the river, a dark cloud on his brow. He was not thinking of his daughter now. Thought of her a moment ago had led to his thinking of life as a whole, and he was ready to declare that life was a failure. He had got the impression more deeply than ever before, and in a disagreeable way, that his daughter was an alien. The way she had of pausing and then asserting herself positively: what sort of way was that for a young woman? She ought to be docile, tractable. Her mind ought to be a page for her father to write in. What should a woman know of logic? Yet she had a way of holding her own with firmness, if not with actual hardness. She had not the disposition of either a kitten or a lamb, but rather the attitude of an eagle, which can be as beau-

tiful as another bird, but which does not forget that it can also be swift and strong. Had she got this sort of thing at that American school and in the house of that American lady who had said with an ambiguous smile that she was going to be a young woman of character?

He realized that he was falling a victim to a form of nostalgia. He experienced a wish to turn back many pages in the book of Time. He measured the span of his life and perceived that it was a long one. He had dwelt in two hemispheres, had been at home in the Old World and the New. He had accustomed himself to think as well as to speak in two languages. His wife had been dead so long that her grave bore evidences of ruin and decay. The stone was stained with years. And his daughter had grown to be a woman with views of her own.

It seemed to him that everything in the world had changed from what it had been when he was young. He reflected: "Nothing is permanent save principles, and the most active principle of all is that life is a mere breath on a glass, to vanish into nothingness."

He tried to free himself from a mood which he knew could lead to no good—which, certainly, could not aid him in getting intelligent work out of the Mexican workmen, casually chosen, upon whom he must depend that day for work which required precision and force. He lifted his head and walked more vigorously, presenting now a pleasantly romantic picture, with his great physical strength and his slightly rakish sombrero, his truculently bristling gray hair and swarthy complexion and brooding, generous eyes.

The cause of his discontent was of the simplest. He had arrived at the conclusion that his daughter was instinctively moving toward Ramon and that she would

eventually lose herself in him. And this was at variance with his own deeply cherished dream. He had had his own mind on Victoriano. Victoriano was adaptable and handy; he saw straight. He was no talker, and he was a man. He would know how to be useful about the ranch; he was the sort of man who might be trusted some day to take over its management. And he was a comfortable companion. As for Ramon, having him about the house permanently would be as impossible as sitting down to a dinner of black bread with a ballet dancer. Ramon was the sort of person for whom one ought to have a curtain that would lift and fall. He was an indoors man, with a pernicious habit of wanting to say everything.

He lifted his head again; he was within sight of the river now. He could see his own group of workmen—the men of the ranch—together with outsiders specially employed. He tried to make out what they were doing. His puzzled gaze slowly gave place to an incredulous expression, which was immediately succeeded by black rage. The distant workmen were opening a sluiceway with the obvious intention of inundating one of the larger fields: a field which he particularly wished kept dry because of alterations which were to be made in its system of tiny canals. Water would be rushing into the field in another moment. He shouted with such power that cords stood out on his face and throat. His voice had no carrying power. The workmen continued their deliberate efforts. He shouted again, and then he began to run in the direction of the river. He waved his sombrero and again he tried to shout.

He had been wrong in his appraisal of his daughter's attitude. She was not drifting instinctively toward

Ramon. She was not really in love with any one as yet. She was in love with the thought of being in love. She had no one in mind as a possible lover, save Victoriano and Ramon. She was trying to decide which of the two she wished to enshrine in her heart. She wished to love one of them. She knew that when she permitted herself to do so the other one would mean almost nothing to her. But she was still weighing, considering, dreaming. She weighed Ramon's enthusiasm, his vivacity, against Victoriano's simplicity, his somber depths. She thought of Ramon's wealth: certainly she thought of Ramon's wealth, and of his family, which she felt sure was really prominent and elegant. She smiled and gazed into distance with parted lips when she thought of Ramon's mother, whose dresses had no starch in them and who wanted to give away everything. As against this picture she brought to mind images of the home life of the Shreves, Victoriano's mother and father. She recalled the barren house in which there was no money to buy things, the boundless acres which she associated with hawks in the sky rather than with valuable produce or anything green. Her brows contracted when she thought how Victoriano must spend his hours at home, with a mother who was as taciturn as himself and a father who came and went irregularly, and who found his recreations among the Mexicans along the river.

She thought of Ramon as an inexhaustible storehouse of nice sayings; and then when she thought of Victoriano her mind halted. She recalled how she had sometimes gazed at him almost impatiently and wondered what images he was building up in his mind. He was far from being without mystery in her eyes. She pondered the mystery in him. It drew her by that power which induces human beings occasionally

to turn away from pleasant friends needlessly and roam away into the dark.

"Ramon has a beautiful mind," she mused; and immediately she reflected that Victoriano had a great heart.

Both were gifts of God, both were to be admired and cherished. "And perhaps," she thought, "Victoriano has a beautiful mind, too, and Ramon a great heart."

She wondered if she need arrive at a preference for either just yet. It was pleasant to be with either of them; and really, marriage was not all of life. Of course it was the greatest thing, but there was so much for mind and body to enjoy before one entered the deep waters.

She began to think of her father. She could not have said why it was that she remembered him particularly on a day when she and he had gone to visit her mother's grave. She recalled how he had gazed at the grave. Some grasses he had gathered into his fingers had dropped to the ground listlessly. When he had spoken again there had been a plaintive note in his voice, and a kind of huskiness. She suddenly realized that her father was growing old. He was growing old and rather pathetic. What friends had he in the world? There was Victoriano. How closely knit they had become with the passing of years! They were really alike in some ways. Both possessed a maturity, a gravity—as if they never forgot that life has its periods of storm. Her heart warmed at the unspoken—perhaps the almost unguessed—affection between these two.

She started up with blanched cheeks. One of the women servants in the rear had screamed and others had quickly admonished her to hush. There was the

tread of feet, heavy, measured. She rushed to the door. Her father . . . They were carrying him! He was in a recumbent attitude; he was nearly hid by men who were bearing him into the house. She caught a glimpse of his face, like wax.

She had a couch ready instantly; she held the door open. She gave directions: "Bring him in here. Mind, Pasquale!—hold his head more carefully. Oh, let me have your place!"

His eyes were almost fixed upon hers, yet he did not see her. She felt her limbs tremble, though she was now holding his head steadily.

She heard the clatter of hoofs. The doctor had come out from Eagle Pass. Word must have been sent to him, she reflected. He bustled into the room, which he cleared instantly of all save Fidesia. There was the clatter of hoofs again. Fidesia glanced up to see Ramon enter. She felt that she wished he had not come just then.

Trinidad Valverde was not dead. He had simply suffered a stroke, from the effects of which he recovered amazingly. Something remained: he moved his right hand and foot uncertainly, as if they were partly asleep; but his mind was clear and hopeful. The doctor from Eagle Pass sat by his side the third day after he had suffered the stroke and nodded approvingly: nature had obviously adopted precisely the proper course in this instance. Valverde was recovering. The doctor had done practically nothing. There had seemed nothing for him to do. But now he undertook to merit a fee.

"The only thing," he said, "is rest and absence. You must do nothing. You must get away. The further and the longer the better. A complete change."

"I can't leave my daughter," said Valverde sharply.

"You needn't," said Fidesia, leaning forward. "I'll go with you. I'm sure the doctor is right."

"Where should I go?" asked Valverde.

"Anywhere you've ever wished to go," suggested the doctor. "Down to the City, to New York, anywhere."

Valverde laughed as if all this were nonsense of a delicious sort. "To Spain?" he asked.

Fidesia made reply. "Yes," she said, "to Spain. It's the very place."

Valverde's eyes darkened. "To Spain?" he repeated in a changed tone.

"Why not?" asked the doctor.

He was not to be driven. He would not consent readily; but for three days his manner was thoughtful and a little mysterious. It came to him gradually that a way had been offered by which he might save Fidesia from Ramon. If he were to keep her abroad a year, Ramon would be gone when she returned. They might never hear of him again. While Victoriano, on the other hand, might have awakened. He might by that time realize that Fidesia had become a woman and that the time had come to win her. To Fidesia he said at length, decisively, "We'll go." He observed her sharply as he spoke, and he was surprised that she seemed actually delighted because of his decision. He could not fathom this; but then he had never heard that story of an Aztec princess and her two swans.

There was endless preparation to make; the care of the ranch had to be mapped out and a manager engaged. There were scores of things for Fidesia to do, and there was the need of waiting until Valverde was able to travel.

During this period Fidesia avoided confidential mo-

ments with Victoriano and Ramon. She thought of them much, perhaps almost constantly. She was a little afraid they might meet and quarrel. But she gave them to understand that she had no time for any one but her father. And indeed, they both accepted this. Nothing was further from their minds than a quarrel—now. They looked at Trinidad Valverde with awe. They missed something in him, the old force and truculence. To Victoriano he seemed like a splendid structure meant to house warlike spirits, but given over to religious relics.

However, Fidesia reserved an afternoon for the two young men. She sent for them the day before she and her father went away. She did this somewhat with the air of a Portia putting out her caskets.

They came into her presence constrainedly, glancing at each other askance. Victoriano despised Ramon now: it seemed to him that Ramon was flashy, that he lacked genuineness, that he might be counted upon at any time to behave cheaply, if he were suddenly cornered. Ramon subtly felt the weight of this condemnation and smarted from it. He assumed an indifference which he did not feel.

Fidesia began a little nervously the story of her departure and farewell. She had that to say which must be said with tact and kindness. When she faltered for the first time Ramon took the opportunity to say:

"You'll be willing to answer my question, Fidesia, before you go away?" He spoke with dignity.

She flushed and said: "Please, Ramon, let me answer your question when I come back."

He weighed this. Presently he said mildly, "Yes, if you wish."

Victoriano stirred impatiently. "And when will you answer my question?" he asked.

She did not pretend that he had asked no question. She would not trifle with him. His whole life had been a question. "I shall have an answer for you at the same time," she said.

Perhaps they were both afraid of losing her. Victoriano voiced this fear when he said: "It will be a fine journey for you, Fidesia."

She read his heart, and Ramon's. "Yes," she said, "but I expect to find here, when I come back, that which I prize above all other things."

They wondered what she meant. Ramon came near to guessing. "Of course," he ventured, "love would come first of all——"

Victoriano cast a rebuking glance at him. How could a man utter such words? How, especially, if he knew what they meant?

"Love would be part of it," said Fidesia; "perhaps, in a sense, the whole of it. Yet that wasn't what I meant."

Ramon was smiling. "Couldn't you tell us what it is, Fidesia?" he asked.

She shook her head slowly. "It wouldn't help you any to be told," she declared. "It's something that can't be put into words—something that becomes meaningless when you try to describe it as you would other things."

Ramon continued to smile. "It sounds like Portia's caskets," he said.

She glanced at him, hinting her disapproval. Victoriano wouldn't know what he meant by that. It was inconsiderate, even rude, for Ramon to ignore Victoriano in that way.

There was silence again during which Fidesia sought an approach to a delicate subject which could not be ignored. How was she to leave Victoriano and Ramon

together, unless they promised not to quarrel? It was as if Ramon read her mind; for he said casually, "I shall not stay here while you are gone, Fidesia. I shall go away for a year: back to San Antonio, perhaps. Anywhere."

She replied to this quickly, almost forlornly: "But you've only just begun your work," she said.

Victoriano glanced at her curiously. She seemed too deeply interested in Ramon's welfare. And as for Ramon: was it possible that he was planning to follow Fidesia?—perhaps at a distance? His pulses began to leap. He had no fear that Fidesia would deal unfairly with him; but things might go badly with him if Ramon found ways to serve her while she was thousands of miles from home. He interposed firmly, his voice startling the others because of its emphasis.

"You needn't give up your position," he said to Ramon. The words seemed like an accusation. "I'll go away," he added.

They both looked at him in amazement.

"How can you?" asked Fidesia.

He flushed. "Why shouldn't I?" he demanded. "There's little to hold me here when you and your father are gone." He looked from one to the other. "My work here is finished," he added. "I've sent the cattle away. Ramon can stay where he is."

They went away, Fidesia and her father, a day later. Because of Valverde's condition they had to go in the old surrey, unused for many a year. A cavalcade surrounded them. Their progress to Eagle Pass and the station was a spectacle, almost feudal. Victoriano and Ramon were there, of course. At the station, at the last moment, Victoriano said—"Good-by, Fidesia." He experienced a sudden, tremendous wish to express

himself. He was almost beside himself in that moment. He was on the point of seizing her in his arms. He would have done so but for the fact that her manner clearly forbade it. She was wearing a gay manner for the occasion. She spoke of trivial things to others who were about her. She was gone, presently. The train was making its way toward Spofford Junction and the Southern Pacific, already a diminishing object on the distant plain. Soon the rumble of wheels had become faint, far-away. There remained only silence and a blur of smoke against the horizon.

CHAPTER VII

HOW VICTORIANO BEGINS A STRANGE PILGRIMAGE AND HOW HE SEES A LIGHT AT THE HEAD OF A STAIR- WAY

BEFORE Victoriano became a wanderer—before his almost incredible new experiences began—he spent a week in his father's house. Once during the week he rode out over the range, but he returned to the house resolved to do this no more. He could not bear the sight of the abandoned plains where the silent cattle had formerly drifted. The spirit of companionship had departed. His father's countless acres had become as a lifeless body.

At the end of a week he supplied himself with a little money by selling his horse and other personal possessions, and then he went away.

At the last he found this step strangely difficult. His father's ranch had been like a little kingdom. He had wanted for nothing, he had been permitted to come and go at will. It had been a pleasant way of living—if only there had been a little more grass! He should have to accustom himself to other conditions when he went among strangers. He should have to receive money for his labor, and pay out money for everything he received. There would be working hours to observe, masters to please, associates to get along with—a harness to wear. No more for him the solace of long silences and loneliness and aimless rides!

He journeyed toward the north until he came to the Southern Pacific railroad: two lines of steel running away to the sunset. That night he was on a train which sped with a loud roaring noise through arroyos and over bridges spanning dry beds of streams: he was among strangers, he was on his way to strange places.

Days and nights passed. There had been for a time a certain diversion, riding on the train. He noted the plush seats, dust-covered yet luxurious, and the woodwork, heavy and substantial, even elegant. But at length the monotony of riding became intolerable, and when the train stopped again he made his escape as from a prison. Indeed, he had beheld an enticing, strange picture through the car window.

He found himself in a beautiful land where everything was green. He beheld oranges growing. There were thousands of oranges, like golden nuggets, lying on the ground—because the pickers were few. There were crystal streams, full-banked, unfailing. He might have gone to work in the orange belt. Even inexperienced men were acceptable. But he was quickly estranged by the ways of the people among whom he had come. They were foolishly busy, almost frantic. They talked a great deal about money: money which the oranges would fetch, money the pickers could earn, money which the railroads charged, even money which the orange boxes cost. Money for rentals, for land, for trees, for service. But not a word about the miracle of a green and gold world. He was asked if he wanted a job. A job? The word struck him oddly. He pondered, disconcerted, and presently he continued on his way. As a result of a chance companionship he presently boarded another train.

Late one afternoon he aroused himself from dozing

to find a great city all about him: San Francisco. He left the train and wandered aimlessly along a street like a new sort of cañon. High walls looked down upon him from either side. He wondered if men were as restless and strange here as those men back in the orange belt had been.

He soon found idle persons. He found them in numbers. But they were like persons in an evil dream. They stood at street corners, they leaned against things, they drifted from point to point. They were grimy, stale. They seemed not to know one another. They had nothing to say. They looked at nothing, though all about them was a wonderful panorama, a splendid city.

He tried to mingle with these men. They looked at him strangely. "What did he want?" they seemed to inquire by their glances. They had nothing to say to him, they did not care what he had to say. The few who were interested manifested a furtive, inimical interest.

He found a boarding-house as night was falling: an old residence which had formerly been a place of elegance and wealth. Now factories crowded it. When he entered the front door he observed a noble staircase which had been much defaced by persons who did not prize it. No one admitted him. The door was open and he had entered, after deciding that no one meant to respond to his knock. A dozen young men and women were waiting for their evening meal. They were young persons who seemed spent, yet who were noisy, who chattered with a strange levity, all together. Their voices were loud and unpleasant. They were employees of a factory nearby. They paid no attention to Victoriano. He could see that they were not unaware of his presence but that they ignored him con-

sciously. Presently he sat at the table, between two men who were branded in body and mind by perfunctory toil. They talked across him in a code-like language. He gathered that they had heard of a job where the wages were better than they were now being paid.

"A job," he mused. That unfamiliar word again!

He arose from the table after one or two others had done so. He paid for a meal: a slatternly woman with the eyes of a dishonest merchant came forward to receive payment. His hat, which he had left on a hall-tree, was not at first to be found. The place where he had left it was now covered by a woman's hat and wrap. He found his hat on the floor. He took it up, dusting it. He descended the front steps, which suggested far-away, fine things, and went on his way. He must find another place to sleep in.

He found himself after half an hour's walk in the Barbary Coast region. This was better, he thought. At least, it was less noisy. He even caught a kind of simplicity about him, a something which he recognized. He came upon a sign-board in the form of an inverted V, with announcements written upon it in chalk. Food was to be had for ten cents—that was the essence of it. He had not relished the boarding-house supper; he was yet hungry, and more particularly, he was lonesome. He looked into the place. No one was in sight save a jolly-appearing fat man who wore an apron. He went in out of the dismal night which was lowering about him.

Here were no outward flourishes of a respectability tarnished and mean. He asked if he might be served.

The fat man's jollity faded as if it had been done poorly in the beginning—like a fabric colored with a

cheap dye. He appraised Victoriano; and then the jollity came back. "Sit down," he said.

Victoriano did so. The man brought him a wooden block and a mallet and went away again. Victoriano looked at the block and the mallet thoughtfully. The man returned with a big, sprawling red thing, depositing it on the wooden block.

"What is it?" asked Victoriano.

The man was of a certain cosmopolitanism. He was as capable of concealing surprise as the most expert diplomat, as those who dine with kings. "A crab," he said. He perceived that Victoriano was really simple. "I'll show you," he added. He drew a chair to the other side of the block. He took up the mallet and tore a limb from the crab. He cracked the limb with the mallet. He brought forth white meat which he ate with a perfect imitation of relish. "See?" he asked.

Victoriano was interested. He took the mallet from the other's hand and followed the other's example. He uttered a low exclamation. Here was a real feast!

The man arose and went away, returning with a vessel like an aquarium, with a handle on either side. It was running over with a creamy foam. He put it down before Victoriano. Then he went back behind his bar, which he rubbed with a cloth, using prodigious energy. Presently he lifted his head and held the cloth suspended in one hand.

"How you like her?" he asked.

"Fine!" said Victoriano.

"Good!" said the man.

That was all the conversation there was. Others came in and had to be served with blocks and mallets and crabs. The proprietor also turned on a light. The place acquired a delightful cheerfulness without ceasing

at all to be simplicity itself. Two men in uniform came in—soldiers from the Presidio. They were neat, vivacious-appearing young fellows, impervious to ordinary mental disturbances because they were wards of a generous—even a spendthrift—government. They found places near Victoriano and engaged him in a conversation by methods so spontaneous that he was afterward quite unaware of how he had become acquainted with them. They recognized his unusualness, his quality. They managed to discover almost immediately that he was looking for a boarding-house. They might be able to help him, they said. Where was he working?

When they learned that he was not working anywhere they looked him up and down. Why not enlist?

He put the suggestion from him without even considering it. He had different plans, he said. One of them suggested that at least he might go with them to the Presidio. They'd find him a bunk for the night and he could have breakfast in the morning. It was allowed, they explained. If he didn't like the looks of things after he'd spent the night with them he could go away.

He shook his head. He was sorry to part with them, nevertheless. There was a quality of largeness about them which matched his own plainsman's view of things. He bade them good-night reluctantly.

He turned as he went out, meaning to say good-by to the proprietor; but the jolly fat man was plying his trade of being jolly with others now, and he could not catch his eye.

He was a little dismayed when he came out on the street. Night had fallen, a darkness more complicated and confusing than any he had ever known. The sky was overcast, a sinister blank. There were street lamps

in all directions, but they were only as conventional voices, announcing the dark without dispelling it. They cast their beams only a little way, while outside the radius of their illumination there were engulfing voids.

The street descended sharply, he knew not whither. He paused to get his bearings. At the end of the incline he was descending—at the end and beyond—a region of an alluring complexity loomed. There were groups of lights which were duplicated by some mysterious process: a dozen or so beacons above, an equal number, showing in a blurred and diminished fashion, below.

He was, in fact, almost within a stone's throw of the bay, where scores of ships lay at rest.

He continued on his way, marveling a little, partly forgetting for the moment his need of a place of shelter. Then he was rudely reminded of his need. A clap of thunder, explosive and reverberating, shook the walls near him. It seemed like a proclamation that the places of the real noises—of the real silences—were present, despite all the mean enterprises of the men who dwelt in the city.

He turned a street corner a little anxiously, because it seemed to him that he was approaching too near to the water front. He was not insensible of the magnitude of that experience—approaching the sea for the first time. He reflected that it would be a revelation and a delight, in the morning, to stand where he now stood, to draw closer, and look upon the places of the ships and the tides and the trackless thoroughfares over all the world. But this was not the sort of experience he should have chosen in the dark, especially at a time when he was as yet shelterless.

He became aware gradually of a sort of stillness

which was disturbing rather than restful—a stillness hinting at stealth and secrecy and evil. He had come into a thoroughfare which was deserted as well as dark. Yet perhaps not wholly deserted. There were echoing footsteps, it seemed; echoes, shadows, whispers. A place of specters, it might have been.

The street was narrow; the buildings on either side, high and dark, presented an uneven yet unbroken skyline. He was wholly at a loss as to the character of this region. It was not a place where men and women dwelt, almost certainly; and yet he began to note evidences of the presence of human beings behind the dark walls. In one window across the way a vapor-like glow appeared. It deepened and then faded. Some one up there was carrying a lamp, perhaps in a rear room. A little further down the street one window glowed steadily. Into this lighted space two figures obtruded themselves: a man and a woman. Their heads and shoulders formed ogre-like silhouettes against the background of light. They appeared to be on their knees before their window. One and then the other arose and wandered away, disappearing like objects in roily water.

Victoriano paused and looked back over the way he had come. His memory held no impressions of opportunities missed. Perhaps he had better press forward until he came into a neighborhood of a less furtive and dreary type. He was about to continue on his way when the sound of thunder filled the narrow street with a shocking detonation. Almost simultaneously rain began to fall. Great drops smote him, penetrating his clothing. He stepped hurriedly into a doorway.

He stepped into a doorway, but for a moment he was as unconscious of the region into which that doorway opened as if he had found shelter under a rock in the

desert. His mind was fixed on the street. Despite the din of the hardflung rain he now heard other noises. Somewhere in that region of impenetrable shadows men were running. He could see them pass a street-lamp at a corner, beyond which they were swallowed up again. He could hear shouts. Whatever human beings were abroad, it was plain that they were seeking shelter.

The rain became heavier, a steady downpour. A wind arose, carrying the drops out of their course in the form of a drenching spray. Victoriano stepped back further, into a hallway. He had now found a satisfactory refuge: the rain could no longer reach him. And then at last it occurred to him to turn, to obtain some sort of knowledge of this place into which he had intruded.

A stairway ascended behind him. It ended upon a landing above his head. The landing was illuminated faintly by an invisible lamp. He was also aware now that there were voices murmuring, rumbling, somewhere in that unknown region to which the lighted landing admitted. Men's voices, certainly; yet the roar of the rain so cloaked that sound of voices that he could not have said whether they conversed amicably or with malevolence. He listened attentively. It was good to know that others of his kind were not far away.

Then it suddenly seemed that his heart had stopped beating, that his whole being had been disorganized. There was an outcry up beyond the head of the stairway, a sound at once horrible and incredible. It was the unashamed cry of a man in deadly terror, screaming for mercy.

Victoriano was half-way up the flight of stairs before he was aware of having moved. He was on

the landing before it had occurred to him that he might be setting his feet in a forbidden place. The scream had ended. It seemed to have been annihilated rather than cut short. It had been succeeded by the fall of a heavy body: Victoriano had felt the floor vibrate. Then there was the sound of footsteps, succeeded by complete silence.

These lesser sounds guided him to a closed door, which he thrust wide open.

His eyes narrowed suddenly. He had come into a lighted room—but also he had come into a place of violence and tragedy. A man lay on the floor bleeding freely from a stab-wound near the heart. In the main, the body had already become inert, though there were involuntary twitchings of the muscles, and the eyes were open, and the face yet distorted by an agony which might have been mental as well as physical.

Beyond this body, which was that of a man a little beyond his prime, an open window was visible. There was no one else in the room. There was no avenue of escape from the room save that open window. The man on the floor had obviously been slain, and his slayer had escaped from the open window.

Victoriano crossed the floor, stepping over a broadening red flood, and looked from the window. He looked into the beating rain, made visible along one narrow avenue formed by a distant street lamp. He could not see into the region below the window. He looked down, but he might as well have looked into a bottomless pit. He reflected: he had mounted but a short flight of stairs since leaving the street. The leap from the window to the earth below could be but a comparatively short one. A man might have made that leap with but slight risk of injury.

He turned toward the interior of the room again,

approaching the body on the floor. The muscular movements had ended. He stooped and took up a short, heavy knife, the blade two-edged and with a haft of unusual width, which lay beside the man who had been slain. By some obscure law of the senses he remembered now—though he had not realized this before—that at the moment he had burst into the room of tragedy he had heard an agitated scampering in some invisible region of the house. Other persons escaping, he now concluded; perhaps by way of a back staircase.

Now he again heard footsteps, heavy, rapid. Men were ascending that staircase by which he had come. He continued to stand above the prostrate body of the slain man, the two-edged blade yet in his hand. Then with a nervous and alarmed straightening of his body he witnessed the entrance of those men who had come clattering up the stairs.

They were police officers, two of them, and instantly they were regarding Victoriano in a manner which there was no mistaking. His mouth suddenly went dry. What a position was this in which he had placed himself! It would seem that he had committed the crime, of course! The gleam of a weapon in the foremost officer's hand caught his eye.

Instinctively he thought of the open window, of the short leap to the ground, of the impenetrable darkness into which he might escape. With the agility of a wild creature he was at the window, a foot on the low sill. He sprang just as the officer fired. He heard the hiss of the bullet close to his ear.

For one interminable second he dropped through black space; then he struck what seemed to be a bricked court or sidewalk. He pitched forward on his shoulder and head and arm. A pain like fire enveloped him;

he heard the sound of a bone snapping. He could feel the sharp fragments of broken bone piercing his flesh. In his fall he had broken a leg.

He lay motionless, despite the pain of his injury. In a mere flash of time he had measured the situation which confronted him. His escape depended upon his own silence and upon a continuation of the drumming rain which blotted out the earth. If it were not known that he lay there, disabled, he might find strength to crawl away presently.

He reproached himself angrily for having made that leap in the dark. The act had been a confession of guilt. At least it would be so construed. He had made his situation a thousand times worse by his cowardly impulse. He had transformed a merely unpleasant situation into a dangerous one.

He heard no movement above. He moved a little so that he might glance up toward the open window. If the officers had looked out after him they had withdrawn from the window again. It occurred to him that they would certainly descend and search the yard, or areaway, into which he had fallen. But he could hear no sound save the beat of the rain on the hard surface around him.

Then again he felt the ugly grip of terror. A hand, put forth warily, had found him. It had rested upon his side, and now it felt its way along his body toward his shoulder, his arm. It found his hand—and pressed it! A voice scarcely a foot from him uttered a warning whisper.

That hissing message of caution and that pressure of his hand were not to be misread. A friend, not a foe, had found him. This was his conclusion. At any rate, there seemed little chance that he might save himself unassisted, and it seemed the part of wisdom

to place himself at the mercy of the person who crouched above him.

He felt two hands on his body now. Two powerful hands lifted him slowly and carefully to his knees. One hand held him in position while an unexplained movement went on about him. Then he was swung free of the ground. He was swung up so that his body described an arc, and then he came to rest upon a broad, bent back. With his free hand—the other had been held captive while he was being swung aloft—he felt about him. He could trace an immense shoulder, a bull-like throat and head. He gave over this examination, which might easily have been misread, and simply clung to the man who had lifted him. He was conscious of being carried along the dark wall of the house. The man who bore him was not only an obviously gigantic and powerful man, but he exhibited that sure-footedness which meant familiarity with the way he had taken.

He felt himself borne around the angle of the house and along a narrow passage-way; then through a gate into an alley. He caught sight of a line of alley lamps.

There had been no hint of pursuit as yet. The man who carried him continued on his way silently, not without speed, until he had come out upon a street and turned. A moment later he entered another alley. The rain continued to fall in torrents. They encountered no one.

At length the silent Atlas in the rôle of rescuer stopped. Victoriano felt himself shifted and swung through space and lowered. He was carefully deposited on a door-sill. Now—at last—he was addressed.

"Where do you want to go?" he was asked.

"I want to find a boarding-house," he replied.

"You've got none: is that what you mean?"

"That's what I mean. I only got here to-day."

"Got a job?"

That irritating word again—a job. "No," said Victoriano.

The man seemed to reflect. At length he said, "Then you better go with me."

CHAPTER VIII

HOW VICTORIANO FINDS HIMSELF ON BOARD A SHIP AND HOW A STRANGE TALE IS RELATED TO HIM

AGAIN he was swung aloft; again he was clinging to a broad back. He was borne down alleys, past rain-shrouded street-lamps. He tried after a time to shift his position slightly—and a pain like fire almost took his breath away. He had never been so near to fainting. He closed his eyes the better to control himself. There was, indeed, an interval during which he was scarcely more than half conscious, though he clung instinctively to the broad shoulders from which his hands had almost slipped.

He aroused himself when he realized that he was no longer moving, that he had been deposited on a bed, in a sheltered place. He heard, almost as if he were dreaming, the voice of his rescuer utter one word: "Wait."

He became conscious then of mingled odors to which many things may have contributed: tar, oil, oakum, canvas, steam, crude soap. He felt about him in the darkness. His fingers found out a pillow, a blanket, a wall. Nothing more. He mused: "We came down a stairway, but where?" He sensed an unfamiliar instability—as if he were being stealthily, gently rocked. Gradually he perceived that a dim light entered the place where he was by means of a circular opening above his head.

He gave over his speculations with a sense of guilt. He was a sort of guest, after all. Besides, some one was approaching. There was a swinging light near at hand, growing brighter. The giant of the broad back stood before him in a moment, holding a lantern forward and aloft.

"Where am I?" asked Victoriano.

The man put the lantern down on a table and regarded him deliberately. He seemed a strangely tranquil man, all save his eyes, which held a storm in leash under their bunched brows. He took Victoriano in detail by detail. At length he replied: "In my stateroom. On my ship, the *Gray Wing*."

Victoriano tried another question: "Who are you?"

"Captain Hogg," was the reply; and then in a curiously restrained, almost menacing tone: "Did you happen to know Jim Billings?"

The expression on Victoriano's face replied for him. Captain Hogg inquired further: "How did you happen to be in that room—back yonder?"

Victoriano was now lying almost motionless. He could endure the misery of a shattered bone now that he had escaped what seemed an ugly predicament, if only temporarily; and moreover, the mystery of his surroundings, of his situation, helped to banish the thought of pain. "I heard a man scream," he replied. "I was standing down in the doorway, out of the rain. I ran up the stairs."

"He screamed all right—didn't he?" said Captain Hogg. His eyes were now gleaming terribly. He added, "We must see how bad you're hurt."

He undressed Victoriano with skill and care. He held the lantern close. "A bad break," he said, frowning. He glanced over his shoulder and listened. His glance brightened with relief: some one whom he had

evidently summoned during his absence a moment earlier was now approaching.

This was a man whose strangeness caused Victoriano to stare a little: a black man of a breed unknown to him. The man's skin was of a velvety fineness; his features were delicate; his black, stiff hair, close shorn, straight. He was obviously a man of a far-off nativity; he proved to be a surgeon.

He in turn made an examination of Victoriano's injury—a more minute one. He was not at all surprised or curious. He leisurely adjusted the lantern, and then he glanced at the ceiling.

Captain Hogg evidently understood that glance; for while the newcomer, who had not ceased to arrange certain materials and implements on the table, continued with his preparations, the Captain lighted a chandelier which was fixed rigidly to the ceiling. A stronger light filled the stateroom.

Victoriano had now directed his attention again to Captain Hogg, who was standing with a kind of forceful inactivity, as if he meant to lend a hand if he were given a chance. He was, Victoriano concluded, the most extraordinary figure of a man he had ever seen. He was not tall, not even of average height; but he was of gigantic proportions otherwise. He was incredibly huge of chest and shoulders and back and throat; of ungainly width of loins, of barrel-like legs. His hands seemed too large and heavy to be of use in ordinary tasks. His face was rough-hewn, with powerful jaws and chin, yet the features had been assembled according to a symmetrical plan. It was not at all a bad face. The eyes, now that certain strange fires of a moment before had burned themselves out, were warmed by the quiet light of equity and patience, even of benevolence. They were very blue. His hair was unruly, thick, like

a boy's—yet grizzled by years and rough weather. Victoriano felt that on the whole this might be a very good sort of man to be associated with when things were going wrong. He looked a more likable man than the surgeon, for example, whose rather furtive eyes seemed incapable of expressing passion and whose manner indicated a cynical aloofness, even indifference.

Yet this other man, the surgeon, with his strangely impersonal demeanor, was a remarkable man, too. He lost not so much as a single movement in setting the broken leg, in adjusting the weights which were meant to insure a proper recovery. And at the very last he smiled fleetingly. He had perhaps found something to admire in his patient's seeming stoicism. Then he went away, followed by the Captain.

Left alone, Victoriano sighed and relaxed. It occurred to him that he might count himself fortunate, after all. Better to think how much worse matters might have been. He had found shelter and quiet—and he had found Captain Hogg. He lay for a long time wondering if the Captain would return. He rather hoped so. He tried to draw a picture of his general surroundings, but this he could not do. A sweet, strange odor of something the doctor had left filled his nostrils. He became drowsy; soon he fell asleep.

He awoke once during the night—it might have been several hours later, he thought—to find himself in the dark. Some one had extinguished the light in the chandelier overhead. The seductive odor he had previously noted was gone. The air about him was alive and bracing. Tangents of wind played about him. Most striking of all, he had the sensation of being on horseback. There was the same indirect, somewhat oscillating movement. The horse he be-

strode—as it were—was moving as if on a long journey: tranquilly, patiently, without fuss or worry. He could feel the slight depression of forequarters and hind quarters as the feet moved forward into new positions, and the muscles of the body relaxed and contracted.

Extraordinary!—for here he was on a bed, with a dead leg attached to him, slung up with weights.

He closed his eyes a long time and pondered. His thoughts refused to be directed; again he slept.

When he awoke other changes had taken place. A dim light, now the light of day, filled the space about him. The light entered through that circular opening above his head. He was no longer riding a horse; he was being tossed gently on a blanket. Yet there he was on a bed.

He took in the room slowly, detail by detail. He perceived that there was a second bed on the opposite side of the room. It had been slept in, but now it was empty. The bedding had been disturbed and was now thrust aside. Other furniture in the room, which was a small one, included the table which he had noted the night before, a number of chairs, a closed book case. The walls presented a simple and severe scheme of decoration. There were faded maps and charts, seemingly of all the globe. A large, stout cabinet contained specimens of coral, sponges, turtle shells polished like mirrors, sea urchins, star-fish—all held securely in place on a wooden background. Another cabinet held outlandish relics: strange swords, a cutlass, a cuirass, a kris, a casque, a shield.

Victoriano could have named but few of these things, but he felt their outlandishness, and he guessed that they all spelt wanderlust.

His eyes were roving from one strange object to

another when he abruptly withdrew them with a feeling of guilt. In a sense he was prying—and some one was approaching.

A youth entered with his breakfast. The youth was barefooted; but this fact did not suggest primitiveness, but rather a degeneration of some sort: as if, in this instance, shoes had been worn for generations and then cast aside. The youth's skin was yellow, his eyes significantly inexpressive.

"Where is the Captain?" asked Victoriano.

The youth stared musingly. He put down the tray he bore and there was an indolent elevation of his outspread hands, his eyebrows, his shoulders. He turned away without speaking.

Victoriano lay staring at the ceiling. It was difficult to think in any definite direction. There were too many things to think about. Then a whiff of steam, an odor of coffee, was borne his way. He lifted himself slightly with his hands. Supporting himself with one hand he reached for the cup of coffee on the tray. He drank with a relish. He relaxed again.

The barefooted boy returned in half an hour and glanced at the tray unmoved. He took it away with an air which seemed to imply that of course no one ever ate his breakfast.

Captain Hogg made his appearance an hour later. He stood looking inquiringly down at Victoriano, who gazed back shrinkingly, because he had a difficult question to ask.

"Feeling all right?" asked the Captain.

"My leg? Yes. Where are we?"

"If you'd been on deck an hour ago you could still have seen the Golden Gate. We've run into a fog now."

Victoriano closed his eyes. He had known it, really.

He was on a ship and the ship had put out to sea. Various impressions of the night before came back to him. That motion like being on horseback was explained. He lifted his glance to Captain Hogg's eyes and read in them a slumbering consciousness of having done a good deed, of being a Good Samaritan. "Where are we going?" he asked.

"Oh, we'll just pick up a few things here and there." The Captain seemed to be renewing and completing his examination of the night before—of the patient. He seemed to conclude more assuredly that Victoriano was worth saving.

Victoriano, on his part, perceived that he might get along very well with Captain Hogg, if circumstances required him to do so. He noted now that the Captain wore an oil-smeared cap and a duck suit which was quite wastefully roomy. Moreover, Victoriano perceived that the Captain was not an excitable man, not a great talker. A substantial person—a man of sense.

He lay pondering. It seemed to him that he ought to ask a few questions, now that he had the chance. He might be left alone again presently. Yet it was contrary to his habit to ask many questions. He had always found it more satisfactory to look about him and find out things for himself. It took longer, but it usually meant a saving of time in the end. Besides, there was a good deal of satisfaction in lying still, unresisting, without worrying. He had not fully realized how disturbing certain of his recent experiences had been—his wanderings about San Francisco in quest of a place to call his own, at least temporarily.

Captain Hogg was smoking a pipe, a wonderful black, ancient pipe with a short stem. The smoke and fragrance from it permeated the room rather delightfully. There were also certain noises not far away,

and these, too, were reposeful in a strange way. They were the sort of noises which suggest leisure, tranquillity, patience. They were unlike the nervous, hateful scrambling and waste of the city, as the noises of his own life away on the plains were different from them. There was something like the unflurried beating of a great heart somewhere. That would be the movement of the engines. It seemed a very substantial, dependable sound. And there were distant voices with the quality of a drawl in them. These were indistinct, impersonal. They descended through a door which the Captain had left open.

Suddenly Victoriano sensed a startling change in the atmosphere about him. The feeling of tranquillity seemed to have been mysteriously routed. What had happened? There had been no movement, no sound in the room in which he was confined. He sought an explanation from Captain Hogg.

An amazing transformation had taken place in the Captain's countenance. His blue eyes had become baleful, malignant. He was holding his pipe in his hand, clutching it fiercely. It was precisely as if a deadly enemy had appeared before him.

Victoriano stirred uneasily. His thoughts reverted to a tragic picture and to an unexplained situation which for the moment he had forgotten. He decided to ask Captain Hogg for certain explanations.

"How did you happen to find me?" he asked.

The Captain dismissed his own ugly thoughts, if one might have judged by the manner in which the stormy expression in his eyes faded. He went directly to the heart of Victoriano's problem without dissembling. "I was below when you jumped from the window," he said.

Why was he there? Victoriano would have put that

question; but perhaps it might be an unwelcome one. Instead he asked, "Why did you bring me here?"

"You hadn't any place—you said."

"That was true. But you might have put me down and gone away. I'm a burden here."

"I couldn't very well have put you down and gone away."

"I mean, after you had got me free of the place—where the police might look for me."

"I owed it to you to do more than that," said the Captain, beginning to draw on his pipe again. He drew energetically. He got no result at all for a time; then smoke began to appear. He was soon enveloped in a cloud.

"Why?" persisted Victoriano.

The Captain continued to smoke—more complacently now. "In a manner," he said, "I was responsible for your mishap. I wanted to pay my debt."

Victoriano pondered. Presently he asked, "How could you be responsible?"

Captain Hogg took his pipe into his hand and looked into its bowl. He thrust his thumb into the bowl. He replaced the stem in his mouth and puffed a time or two before he asked: "What made you jump out of the window?"

"Some officers had come in. There had been a killing. It might have looked as if I'd had a hand in it."

The Captain nodded. "I figured it out that way," he said. Then he seemed suddenly to listen rather anxiously. He arose and went away with a mumbled word which Victoriano did not catch.

It seemed, after all, that Captain Hogg would keep his secret—whatever it was. The first long day at sea ended, and a succession of long days followed,

Much of the time Victoriano lay alone. The surgeon came, and the boy with his meals. He was not neglected. But of companionship, for the sake of companionship, he had none. Captain Hogg appeared and disappeared more or less regularly, wearing a self-conscious, almost a stubborn air—but he held his peace.

Victoriano tried to feel unconcerned. He coveted no man's secrets, he assured himself. As for lying on his back day after day, this quiet, dimly-lighted cabin was perhaps as suitable a place as any other. He would have been a prisoner in any other place—until his broken leg mended. Why not put in the two or three months of his enforced idleness uncomplainingly? As a matter of fact, he had a year to put in somehow. Time meant nothing to him until there was a reason for him to go home. And he could have no reason to go home again until Fidesia and her father were home again.

He settled it all neatly in his mind—and yet his thoughts reverted persistently to the untold story in which he was at least a minor character. He thought more and more of that night when Captain Hogg had found him, of the scene in that house which had sheltered him from rain.

It was not possible, certainly, to disconnect Captain Hogg from the crime which had been committed; and if his presence in the bricked court beneath the window might have been accounted for on grounds having nothing to do with the crime, his own occasional behavior was sufficient to silence those arguments. Victoriano could not quite analyze the Captain's manner and moods, but he could not fail to note intervals of black introspection, of fierce unrest—the more remarkable because of the seaman's placid ways on ordinary occasions.

He began to ponder more curiously upon all this; and soon it began to seem that the Captain was striving to unbosom himself—that he wished to speak of the secret between them. His manner was occasionally fitful, abrupt; his very silence sometimes was like the introduction to a harrowing tale.

“I’ll wait,” thought Victoriano, “and when he gets ready he’ll tell me.” Yet there were other periods during which, true to deeply established habit, he put the matter from him entirely, feeling almost indifferent to it. It did not concern him so very nearly, after all.

Just the same, when the night of the revelation actually came, he welcomed it eagerly. There had been a storm which had stirred Victoriano’s curiosity to the limit. He had wondered if the vessel would not turn completely over the next time it began to turn. He was astounded that nothing in the nature of a climax, a disaster, occurred. Perhaps it would yet. He heard whistling and snapping sounds, and men’s agitated voices which were blown away and lost. Then there had been a closing up, or a closing down, and he had heard nothing more save the disturbance of articles in the room where he was.

Later—hours later—he knew that the ship was not going to turn over. It was now rising and falling almost without a jar, as if it were on a bosom that sighed deeply. It was now late at night.

Captain Hogg came into the stateroom and patiently opened the dead-eye over Victoriano’s bed. Some one had come and closed it during the storm. When it was opened the sound of the dying wind on the night sea came wailingly into the room, ebbing and flowing. The Captain stood in indecision a moment as if he were listening to the wind and couldn’t quite make

it out; and then, seating himself abruptly, he said to Victoriano—

"I once asked you if you happened to know Jim Billings."

Victoriano said to himself: "Now, he's going to tell"; but he did not speak aloud.

The Captain waited an instant and then said: "It was Jim Billings that was in that room in 'Frisco—the night it rained."

Victoriano looked at him curiously.

The Captain continued: "I want to tell you why——" He looked indifferently at his pipe, which had gone out. He knocked the ashes out against his heel and put the pipe in his pocket. He remained silent for a considerable time; and then—

"You've got no wife, I take it?" he said.

"No."

"I had one once. I lost her. I lost her through that fellow you found in the room on the Barbary Coast—Billings."

He paused so long that Victoriano concluded there was to be no more—that he must draw his own conclusions. But at last the narrative was really launched:

"Of course," said the Captain, "no one ever sees a woman through her husband's eyes. She may seem ordinary enough to everybody but her husband. But you may be sure her husband sees her better than others do. He sees more. He may be a bit foolish about her; but at the same time he sees her right. He's not blind to her faults. Nothing like that. But he gets to know what's behind and beyond her faults. He knows what they mean. He may even get to love her for them. Not to admire her for them—I don't mean to say that. But it may be that his compassion, his whole character, is built up on them, so that he's a

bigger man for having a faulty wife. Understand? Her fascination for him may spring in a way from her faults. That sounds absurd, of course; but what I'm getting at is this: in their virtues women are pretty much alike, but they're likely to be peculiar in their faults. It's their faults that make them what they are more than their good points. However . . .

"She was born in a little town in Massachusetts, the same as me. We were neighbor boy and girl together. She had to pass our front gate when she went anywhere. And I can see her yet when she flung her hair, in a dark braid, over her shoulder, as if she scarcely knew where she was—that was when she'd be passing our gate—and then looked slyly over into our yard and at the porch and windows. Looking for me. And she'd go on with another fling of her braid if she saw me, as if I was no better than dirt. She used to go by in the dusk. There was something lonely and secret about her—that sort of little girl. A little dark and strange. She was a little pitiful. She was wilful, and yet there wasn't any fight in her. She'd cry and hide her face in the crook of her arm if she was put upon. I used to jump over three fences and run through as many gardens if I saw a boy tantalize her. And she'd thrust her fists into her eyes and try to get her lips straightened out—and go on without seeming to know I'd come to protect her. An odd, lonely kind of a child, with no fight in her. . . .

"When I was fourteen years old I ran away from home. It wasn't much of a home. My father's sister, a natural-born old maid, had kept house for my father after my mother died. She had died when I was seven. The aunt was a bilious creature with drooping lips and dark blotches under her eyes. She was forever drinking tea and never eating anything. That kind of

a woman. Mostly dressed in shiny black that looked respectable and nothing else.

"I was twenty-seven when I came back home. It seemed to me I'd been away a lifetime. You know that's a great span in your life—between fourteen and twenty-seven. I'd worked at half a dozen things, in twice that many places, and then I'd taken to the sea. I'd been in nearly every port in Christendom—and in some that would come under a different head.

"She was still there—the little girl. Mary Prescott, her name was. She'd been away, too: in Boston several years, studying music. She had got to be a music teacher. Little boys and girls came to her in her house with a sagging veranda and some sort of sweet-smelling vine growing around the window. She had an old square piano with yellow keys. Of a summer evening when the window was open and the vine was in bloom you'd hear her with her children: *tum, tum, tum—tum, tum, tum*. Little hollows were coming into her cheeks and she had a far-away look in her eyes—though there was a smolder in them, too, sometimes. She was the kind of girl that ought to marry. That was my idea, and it didn't take me long to get her to thinking along that line herself. And she married me.

"We didn't get along the best in the world. We both had strong natures: hidden spots, set ways, ideas out of the common. It wasn't long before we'd be parting of a morning in a passion, and then burning up with the wish to meet again and begin all over again, to try a little harder to yield to each other, to understand better. She learned to curse me—and then to cry with her head on my shoulder and her arm around my neck. She loved me: never any doubt about that. Stormy, she was: a creature of thunder and lightning, but always giving way in just a little time, and willing

to meet me more than half-way. If she could be fiercer than another woman she could be tenderer too; and we used to have days of fair weather when we'd walk in step, almost trembling with the preciousness of it. If you don't understand what that sort of thing is it wouldn't be worth while for me to try to explain. Perversities and pity and darkness working together—too much human nature and not enough paying attention to rules.

"We lived our happiest years in San Francisco. I'd got a berth on a ship trading between the States and China. We had a little house on Telegraph Hill, snug and bright, with lots of warm sunshine when the fogs didn't come up the bay and blot out everything. I was away from home a good part of the time, of course, but that only made our days together richer. We got to thinking we'd outlived our dark days. Her cheeks filled out and her eyes began to sparkle. She got color in her face. There were times when she'd seem a bit absentminded—when she'd start if I spoke to her. I don't mean she wasn't something of a mystery to me to the end. But we got a lot of joy out of life, I did. Yes, I'm certain she did too. Maybe we'd both come to expect less. That's a dark thought, you may say; but it's what we all come to.

"Then I got into partnership with a man who owned a tramp steamer. I had got to know a lot about a ship, and I had a reputation for being lucky. *Lucky!* And after that I was kept away from home more than ever. But they were happy years just the same. And that brings me to a sort of strangeness in myself. It seemed I was born to be a wanderer; and there was only one moment when I was happier than when I was sailing away from my wife. That was when I was sailing back. But I couldn't have stayed quiet in one

place. And maybe a man who loves a woman has no right to roam. But you're not to suppose I loved my wife less for wanting to wander. A man may be cursed with a love for two things that don't mix. I didn't love my wife less, but more—a thousand times more. But the craving to be up and away never weakened. Maybe I loved in a different way from other men. It got so it seemed good to have her—a great comfort—even when she was far away. I got to carrying her around in my heart, you might say—and her back in that little house overlooking the Golden Gate. That's deep waters, you'll maybe say—loving, yet eager to be away. Maybe I'm a little mad. I'd not be the first man that was mad and passed for right. But I got so I could sit on a deck, or lie in a hammock, and be perfectly happy with my wife—and her and me the width of the Pacific apart. The ocean seemed no more than a step—just as three feet or so sometimes seems as wide as the universe. Where a man and woman are concerned, I mean.

“There are women like that, too; I mean, women who can be happy alone, who can put up with bits of trinkets for reminders, and fill a room and their bed too with the man they love, though he may be at the other side of the world. But I've come to think that maybe my wife wasn't one of that kind. You see, a man's brain keeps on developing after all his other faculties are on the wane. And it's only lately I've come to understand a lot of things. I've come to understand that my wife might have pined for me—for the trouble I made, and the noises, and even the faults I had—during the long months she was alone. But I got that bit of knowledge, as a man gets most of his knowledge, after it was too late to be of much use.

“I want to make it plain, however, that I never did

know—never have known—just what happened. It may be that to the end she was happier than I think she was, and faithful too. It was necessity that destroyed her at last—necessity and the man named Billings.

“Billings wasn’t a very unusual sort of chap. A fine looker. When you saw him lying on the floor in that house in ’Frisco he had had time to age and go stale a good bit. He was one of those laughing chaps. You know them. He could laugh all over at the drop of a hat.”

For a moment the Captain yielded to a quaking rage, and he mumbled—“Damn his soul, if he’s laughing now he’s laughing in hell.” But he took himself in hand as a man steps back out of a fight he would gladly, force, and continued in an even tone: “That trick of laughing—it made him seem jolly, good-natured. It’s more properly a sign of cunning and evil, but most men and women fall for the old tricks. They like a man who laughs. His eyes would beam, his teeth would show under his red mustache—it was red at one time, though it wasn’t toward the last. He stood straight as an arrow, like a gladiator in a circus, making a show of himself all the time. He wore good clothes. He could always make a man like me look like an outsider, especially to a woman. He used to hold a job down like any other man, though he wasn’t interested in any kind of work. He wasn’t interested in anything but cards—and women. He was a gambler: one of the kind that always wins in the end. By that I mean a crook. He must have been pretty smooth, though his jolly ways probably helped him a lot to fleece simpletons. I think maybe the gay way he had was his best asset. Rightly, no straight man can be jolly much of the time; but being jolly was Billings’s business and he

got away with it. And he had sense of a kind. His working steady—that was the proof. It give him a sort of standing. But it was only a part of his crookedness.

"I never could learn how Billings got acquainted with my wife. I was gone for more than a year, once, and when I got back a neighbor told me, in a casual sort of way, that my wife had been out a time or two with Billings. It was a woman told me: a man never tells such things. I didn't pay much attention. I couldn't say there was any harm in it. I didn't know Billings then except by sight. He was a clerk in one of the dock offices. I got his pedigree afterward. I figured that my wife was still a youngish woman and that she'd have to have friends the same as anybody else. She told me herself, without any prompting, that she had taken to going out a little: to the theater, to spend an hour in the park. She named a number of men and women. She kind of slipped Billing's name in, in between. That came to me afterward. I said, 'All right.' I had to fight myself a little to get rid of a dissatisfied feeling. I didn't want to be unreasonable.

"I suppose three years passed, with everything going along so-so, and then I went on a cruise that was to include the Straits Settlements and around into the Indian Ocean. That was when the end came. There was trouble of one sort or another almost from the beginning: storms that took us out of our course, a minor accident or two, trouble with the crew, and a row with the port officials in one place. Manila, it was. A Spanish official is a pretty bad proposition, as a rule. He's seldom a ruffian, but always a thief. Before we got away from Manila a piece of machinery broke and we had to lie idle until we could send to Hong Kong to replace the broken part. From one unexpected cause

or another I was gone nearly two years on that cruise. And when I got home my wife was gone.

"You're to bear in mind that she'd been gone only two months when I pushed the gate shut and went on up to the porch—to find the door locked. You see, if I'd got home within six months of the time I expected to be back, she'd have been there. It would make it appear that she'd not planned to leave. See?

"I took two steps from the door to the window and shaded my eyes with my hands, looking through the window-pane. I recollect yet that my hands trembled a little. I don't take much stock in presentiments; but in the ordinary way of life mishaps are pretty apt to happen in two years. I looked all about the room. She wasn't there. The house wasn't merely empty of her, it was abandoned. I can't tell how I knew.

"I said 'I'll go to one of the neighbors.' I didn't want to go. I had a fear of being told things I couldn't bear to hear. But I went. You can explain for yourself why I went to the house of that woman who had spoken to me casually about my wife having been out with Billings. She seemed excited when she opened her door and faced me: I'd say elated if she hadn't seemed a bit terrified too. Her glance shifted. 'Mrs. Hogg has gone away,' she said, when I stood facing her. I couldn't think how to put my question, but you see she didn't wait. What surprised me was that I could be as cool as anything, facing that woman who had harbored evil thoughts about my wife. 'So I find,' I said. I don't believe she knew I was excited at all. 'Gone where?' I added. 'I can't say for certain,' said she, lowering her eyes, 'but it's reported——' She broke off and I took pains not to excite her. 'Go on,' says I. 'It's reported,' says she, 'that she has gone abroad.'

"It was true. She had gone abroad. She had gone with Billings. I picked up the facts little by little from men who'd rather not have told me. I went to the offices where Billings had worked. He had gone away, they said; quit without a minute's notice. They hadn't seen him for over a month. And with that as a beginning I got one fact after another until there wasn't any room left for speculation.

"My first thought was that I must take my medicine without making a wry face. At least, without making a fuss. There are things a man says to himself in a case like that: the woman who would do such a thing isn't worth regretting—things like that. But that don't help much. I did regret her. I wanted her back. I could have forgiven her. That's the truth. I began to see where she might have been influenced in ways she couldn't well resist. It dawned upon me that I hadn't been what is called a good husband—going away contentedly on long voyages, pottering about among relics, neglecting my dress. It came to me that the time must have seemed long to a woman staying at home. When you can honestly blame yourself a bit you can forgive others easier.

"I was terribly upset. My first idea was not to do anything at all. The case seemed hopeless. But it began to seem that maybe there was something I might do. Little by little it occurred to me that she might have been almost wholly innocent, no matter how the thing looked. I argued: 'Billings might have lied to her. He's a smooth chap. He might have convinced her that I was ill somewhere—in some sort of trouble—and that he meant to take her to me.' All sorts of fancies came to me. He might have made her believe I had died. It seemed fantastic, that sort of reasoning did. But it kept running in my mind stronger and

stronger. You'll find it hard to understand when I say I had never thought I ought to write her a letter: I mean, during all the years I was away from her. You see, I couldn't write a letter worth writing. That was my belief. It seemed to me a sort of nonsense: the sort of thing you'd leave to men and women who didn't know each other, or trust each other. I was wrong about that, as I was about other things. I know that now.

"Well, it came to me in a week or two that I ought to try to locate her. For one thing, I couldn't stand it, just mooning about. I saw I'd have to do something. It seemed pretty clear that I'd have to see her once more, to give her a chance. She might have something to explain. I wasn't very clear about this. I guess the real fact is that I couldn't bear the thought of letting her drift out of my life forever. I could see how after years had passed, and it would be too late to change anything, I might blame myself for letting go without a struggle. And so I cut loose from all my connections and began a search.

"Did I say I had heard they had taken passage for Hong Kong? I went to Hong Kong. I went to various hotels where an American couple might be expected to stop. No information at all. I went about among the sort of people I knew, among the places I thought might be a bit likely. I didn't know Hong Kong except for its harbor and its shipping offices. I wasn't any good at the sort of job I had tackled. Still, I did find their trail after a couple of months—by accident. An American couple answering their description had stopped with an English family two or three weeks. Then they had gone to Manila.

"It was harder to get my bearings in Manila than in Hong Kong. I had a feeling as soon as I set foot

on shore that she wasn't there. I spent a hopeless month or so tramping about here and there—up and down the Escolta, about the Walled City, everywhere. It was like being in a place where there aren't even any echoes. Then one day it occurred to me that the way to find a man like Billings was to find out where the city's gambling places were. He'd have run out of money, I argued, and would be trying to get more by his wits. I found gambling places, plenty of them; but I never saw a man that looked like Billings. I didn't hope to find *her*, you understand, until I had found him.

"I went back to Hong Kong—to the States—back to Hong Kong, on the strength of rumors. I spent two years idling my time away, poking about in odd corners, standing in front of clubs and gambling joints—such places. I began to feel that people were looking at me oddly, as if they thought me mad.

"Then at last I got on the trail of Billings. In San Francisco. He had been seen about his old haunts during my last trip to Hong Kong. But he had disappeared again. For another two years I played a kind of game of hide-and-seek with Billings. I just missed him two or three times. We both kept coming and going. I couldn't learn that he was trying to escape from me. It was more by chance that he kept out of my way. You know there is something strange—a bit insane, I think—about men of Billings's type. They don't appear to realize they're in any great danger. You'd think a man—any man—who had done what Billings had done would fear forever after that he'd be hunted: that the husband, the brothers, the relatives, even the friends, of the woman he had wronged would never stop until they had got him. If I were ever to do what he did I'd get so that my own shadow would

terrify me. But it seemed that Billings came and went pretty much as he pleased.

"She wasn't with him any more. I learned that he was traveling alone, happy as a lark, irresponsible. He kept to sailing vessels and got into games with passengers. I didn't quite grasp all that meant for a time. I supposed he had her hidden away somewhere. I didn't learn for a long time that this wasn't true.

"He had abandoned her in Manila. Without a friend, without a cent. He had left her in a cheap Spanish hotel one morning and never went back. That I learned long afterward—that and other things I'm about to tell you—from some people who knew her afterward in Hong Kong. She was as helpless as a child when he abandoned her in Manila. If she'd had a certain sort of cunning, a bit of shrewdness, she might have saved herself maybe. She might have gone to a first-class hotel, if only for a day, and claimed to be a personage of some sort . . . I suppose there might have been weapons for her to use. You hear of such things occasionally. But she was always proud and honest in a way, though probably not in the right way. At any rate, she didn't help herself at all. She drifted. She found a few friends of a sort that were worse than no friends at all in the long run.

"Then she went back to Hong Kong. She came to the attention of some sort of benevolent institution there. An English woman—I located her afterward—was the last white person to have any real knowledge of her. She slipped through the fingers of that institution. She found aid of a sort from some Chinese. And she never once tried to connect with me, so far as I could learn. She disappeared completely for more than a year—after the English woman saw her last. And then I got on the trail of one who was described

to me only as a white woman, living with a group of Chinese.

"I knew I was about to find her at last. How did I know? I can't explain. A word or two of description, may be; a report of something she had said—vague things. But I knew. Yet at the very last it wasn't so easy to reach her. I went to that Chinese house, a sinister place of many stairways and dark passages, above and below ground. I was met by unseeing eyes, unhearing ears, blank faces. I could learn nothing.

"One night I went with a small group of white men, sightseers, all idle-minded but myself. We got a guide to show us over the place. You understand it was a sort of show-place—it was so grimy and wretched. We went through many dark areaways, down stairways, and again down stairways, into a region wholly underground. We entered rooms that were evil-smelling and strange. We came upon various small groups of miserable wretches, sitting in unexpected places, in corners, at the bottoms of stairs, on out-of-the-way benches, on moldy shake-downs. They looked at us as from across a great chasm. They were all clinging to the dregs of life, begging a little opium, earning it in hidden ways. It was like a region of ghosts.

"Somewhere I lagged behind. The rest of the party, talking lightly, went on. I saw the guide, torch in hand, turn down an alley. I might have overtaken the others, but something drew me in another direction. I went on alone. I saw a wavering light through a door open a few inches. I entered that door. There were berths, and tables alongside of them with evil-smelling lamps and pipes and brass boxes and other outlandish furniture all about. I came upon an immense Chinaman, a dumb, uncanny brute. He paid no attention to me. There were other Chinamen on the bunks. I

stopped. There was a sickening vapor in the room. The place smelt like a church in hell. Then a ghostly figure stood before me, at the end of a bunk: a woman, an American.

"I had found her.

"She didn't know me. She didn't know anything. She stared sleepily. She was all eyes. Her mouth and chin had shrunk away to nothing—or so it seemed. She had on a nightgown—nothing else. She stood before me and drowsily caught hold of a pinch of that nightgown, scratching herself with it. She kept blinking. She looked like some kind of a damned doll . . ."

Captain Hogg arose abruptly, thrusting his clenched and trembling fists above his head. He stood an instant as if he were dumfounded; and then he disappeared.

CHAPTER IX

HOW VICTORIANO TAKES UNCEREMONIOUS LEAVE OF
CAPTAIN HOGG AND THE "GRAY WING," AND HOW
HE FINDS HIMSELF IN THE DARK

THAT was a shocking story. Captain Hogg had related, Victoriano thought. Some of its details haunted his mind all night, after the story had been told. He was not unfamiliar with tragic stories in which fierce passions stalked. He had occasionally been thrilled by tragedies which had a fierce leap in them, and then a complete evanishment. But Captain Hogg's story was different. It was mean, rather than tragic; it was like a sore rather than a wound. It seemed to cling like an odor.

However, the horror of the Captain's narrative speedily became as nothing compared with a dreadful transformation in the old seaman's character, after his tale had been told. This began (the next morning) in his refusing to look at Victoriano or to speak to him. He was distressingly agitated, his hands trembled, his glance was wild.

Why should this be? Victoriano asked himself. The Captain had been habitually tranquil until he had related his story. Why should the telling of the tale make so great a difference? He tried to find the answer to this question after he had finished his breakfast and was left alone for the long hours of the forenoon.

It was likely, he reflected, that the Captain had be-

come an unenviably conspicuous figure in all the places that knew him: the San Francisco waterfront, the ports he visited, even the streets on which he frequently appeared. And from being a figure to inspire pity he might easily have become a figure that provoked contempt or even amusement in base and pitiless minds. If this were true he would doubtless have longed for the companionship of a companionable man who knew nothing of his shame and his sorrow. "That," he reflected, "would explain why he wanted me on his ship with him." But why, then, had he finally related the story of his domestic shipwreck? Well, he had not done this without a struggle. This had been shown by the manner in which, on numerous occasions, he had seemed to be shaping his mind, to be bearing toward a momentous conclusion—only to check himself sharply and to turn to other matters.

What, then, had caused him to give way at last? The wish to justify himself—if only to himself? It seemed more than likely that he had come to seem a weak and helpless creature in the eyes of those who knew how he had been wronged. Perhaps in his own eyes too. What more natural, then, than that he should experience the wish to point at last to what seemed to him a vindication? He had related his story perhaps, not because he had been wronged, but because his wrongs had been avenged. He had wished to paint the picture of himself as a man triumphant, rather than as a man destroyed.

Victoriano had occasion to go over these matters again and again, for Captain Hogg's manner became more and more in need of explanation. The first outbreak of agitation—like that of a man coming out of an unchecked debauch—was succeeded by a manner even more inexplicable. The old seaman appeared

actually to hate his involuntary guest. His manner was rude, impatient, distressing: the more so because he seemed permanently to have adopted the plan of saying nothing. And this condition of affairs continued for long days which stretched at length into interminable weeks.

Victoriano's injury was slowly mending. At the expiration of eight days he had been freed of the weights which had caused him many a sleepless hour. The time came when he was permitted to sit up. He began to wear his clothes again. There was the promise that if he continued to improve steadily he might soon go on deck. This promise the surgeon made by means of pantomime, but Victoriano understood.

This prospect was the more gratifying because Victoriano had begun to long impatiently for certain information. Where was he?—in what spot on the earth's surface? Whither was the *Gray Wing* bound? When might he expect to set foot on his native shore again? These were questions he would not ask Captain Hogg. He did not feel rebellious toward his host; rather, he entertained a feeling of awe toward him, because of his mysterious demeanor. The Captain was struggling in deep waters and he must be left to find himself.

However, a night came when the seaman broke his silence. Victoriano had lain down for the night. The Captain, off duty, was also getting ready for sleep. He had taken off one of his shoes and sat holding it in his hand, regarding it; and suddenly he lifted his eyes to Victoriano. He leaned forward tensely and spoke in a hoarse tone:

"I left her there!"

He was still thinking of his wife; of her, clearly, and of nothing else.

Victoriano realized suddenly that he hated that tale and all that it denoted. He lay, mentally flinching, waiting for more. But there was no more to follow just then.

Days later the seaman turned upon him almost savagely, his hands shaking perceptibly where they hung by his side. It was yet in the stateroom. "And to think," the old man said, striving to be calm, "she was a musician."

Victoriano lifted his shrinking gaze to the other's face.

"That's to say, trained in being delicate." He placed his fingers on the table, bending over it, and moved them in grotesque suggestion of niceness. "Harmony," he went on. "Did you ever think about that word? Meaning things that blend. Meaning that you've cut out what don't belong. *Harmony*. She was supposed to be an expert at harmony. I take it that harmony means, in other words, what's true." He leaned toward Victoriano as if this were to be confidential: "I can see the place at the foot of the last stairway we went down. A Chinaman was holding a torch. His face was yellow, like wax. He was like an image carved out of wood and painted—and pressed a little out of shape. That would be the torch, you know. Just human enough to be ghastly. There was that smell, sweet and nasty. I thought of going back, and then I heard sounds. Laughing. You couldn't be sure. It might be crying. That was the place where she had come to die. And she was a musician."

On a night when Victoriano slept ill, when there was a throbbing pain in the knitting bone, he sat upon the edge of his bed for relief. He thought it must be near morning. But when he stirred he heard, with dismay, the sound of Captain Hogg stirring too. The Cap-

tain sat up, facing him across the cabin in the dim light. He began with an eagerness beyond control:

"You ought to have seen his face, even before the knife touched him!"

Victoriano could catch the gleam in his eyes.

"He was in his own room when he died—a room he rented from an old couple who never cared what kind of fish they sheltered. He was the only lodger just then. You wouldn't have seen the old couple. I heard their feet pattering down the back way before you came pounding up the front stairs. They would have guessed what was happening. It wouldn't have been for the first time. He had begun to run to seed—Billings. His voice had gone cracked. He had come down in the world. Likely enough he was glad to have even that shabby roof over his head and a blanket to cover himself with at night. Maybe he was thinking about learning to say his prayers. He had run to seed—and that angered me, too. I figured I had a right to find him whole. But we have to learn to take things as they come. And I wasn't cheated so much. The look in his eyes—that paid me. He was paralyzed. I didn't have to make even a sign. He knew what was coming. He looked like a boy about to cry. He couldn't move a muscle—either to defend himself or to run. He was amazed—as if he couldn't believe it: that he could be punished. You would have thought he was about to fall from a high place. And then he screamed."

Victoriano felt for his pillow and lay down again. He closed his eyes.

During the days that followed he dreaded, with an ever increasing dread, those hours during which Captain Hogg was his companion. The old man yielded more and more to periods of extreme agitation. He

began his story at the beginning again. He went over it again and again, adding new details, more intimate revelations.

Yet the business of the *Gray Wing*, whatever it was, seemed to go on smoothly. Victoriano could hear a strange variety of noises above. The tranquillity of long days would give place to excitement. There would be the sound of pulleys whining, of windlasses, of men tramping in lines to and fro. There were occasional outbursts of pattering, excited voices. A language—or languages—unknown to Victoriano was being spoken. Moreover, that human speech seemed to savor of characteristics and temperaments of which he knew nothing. Strangeness reigned. It seemed to him that he must be very far from home. The vessel made many landings; the periods of tranquil sailing became briefer, more constantly interrupted. Off-shore odors reached the cabin: the odors of harbors, of beaches, of commerce, were distinguishable.

A day came when he was assisted to the deck, where an invalid's chair awaited him. He rubbed his eyes with both hands. An infinity of blue waves, white-tipped; a horizon which stood high up against the sky; land far away with the purple bloom of distance on it—these he saw.

But a new and disquieting development impended.

Speedily he made the discovery that of the seventy men aboard the vessel, not one save himself and Captain Hogg could speak the English language. Even the first mate, who seemed an educated man, knew only his own language, which Victoriano guessed to be Portuguese. An odd assortment of human beings made up the crew—men hailing all the way from Scandinavia to India, but with the States left out. There were a score of Chinese, mysterious beings who

were the more sinister because they seemed—but only seemed—a little comic. They wore silk-and-felt slippers without uppers at the heels, which they dragged lightly along the deck with a hissing sound; they drew apart at their leisure, crowding about a gambling device. They squatted and jabbered and hooted. They ignored every one with their unreadable eyes; they created their own atmosphere, drawing the circle of the East about them.

Victoriano was recovering—indeed, he had practically recovered—when he made a final startling discovery touching his situation.

One day Captain Hogg turned where he stood on the distant deck and regarded his guest. Standing alone, he seemed suddenly shaken in a strange way. He approached Victoriano. He began rapidly, eagerly, to repeat some stark climax in the story of Billings and the woman who had been betrayed. He talked volubly, his body quivering, his eyes gleaming. The ship's surgeon, sitting under a canopy of striped canvas not far away, lifted his glance from the book he had been reading. His expression was at first one of boredom; but it quickly altered. His eyelids lifted, his brows lowered, so that his glance seemed to become very intent. He became peculiarly interested. Victoriano felt that an American physician would have manifested alarm.

The truth was evident. Captain Hogg was, for the moment, a madman. He was the sort of madman who is sane enough in all directions but one, but beyond the reach of reason in that one direction. He could deal rationally with the seventy men who were of his crew, but he became hopelessly mad when he faced the one man who knew of his shame and suffering.

Victoriano understood how that might be. He recalled an old ranchman he had known: a man who had sought to work out a method of reading and determining the prophecies in the Bible. And this man, who could talk with great wisdom about sheep or even cattle, became in the next moment incoherent, a babbler, on the subject of prophecies.

He caught the surgeon's glance. The surgeon was intimating subtly that Victoriano ought to go below.

He did so; and presently he heard the voice of Captain Hogg speaking calmly and rationally to one of the sailors.

That night as he slept he was aroused by a hand on his wrist—a hand that gripped him mightily. He opened his eyes to find the Captain bending above him, the gleam of unreason in his eyes.

Victoriano could have groaned in despair. He had been dreaming. In his dream he had been riding with a girl along a smooth trail which terminated in a sunset sky. The girl was Fidesia.

The old seaman, bending lower, began to unloose his tumbling words:

"If you love a woman," he said, "stick to her. Never let her out of your sight. Not because you don't trust her, but so that she'll understand how you feel toward her. Never let her beyond your reach. Keep her in your mind so close that if she stirs in the night you'll reach out in your sleep and hold to her. That wise old fish who called a man and his wife one—he said it all."

Victoriano, struggling out of the Captain's grip, sat up on the edge of his bed. He was breathing swiftly, deeply.

The next afternoon the *Gray Wing* skirted the shore of an island clothed with green. The vessel cast

anchor; one of the ship-boats was lowered and Captain Hogg, with half a dozen sailors, went ashore. Victoriano did not know that the vessel was now in a region where the *ilang-ilang* tree grew to perfection, and that the Captain went in search of little bales which were worth a great price. He knew only that his heart was touched by the sight of the unhappy old man, who moved among his men with a fatherly air, benign and patient. His mind was right enough now. It would be, no doubt, until he was reminded of his private disaster by the sight of the one man on the ship who knew of it.

Victoriano arose and looked away toward the land. Gradually his muscles became tense, his glance brightened. There was *land*. And he had not set foot on land for months. To be on land, he reflected, meant to be within hail of a ship that would bear him back to the Golden Gate—and home. Moreover, his presence here on the *Gray Wing* had come to mean disaster to Captain Hogg. He had been able to read as much in the surgeon's eyes.

He went down into his stateroom so that he might be out of sight when the Captain returned. He stood musing, wondering if all his possessions were in hand. Certain words of Captain Hogg's ran through his mind: *Keep her in your mind so close that if she stirs in the night you'll reach out in your sleep and hold to her.*

The Captain returned just as the night was falling. Victoriano heard the rattle of oars, the murmur of voices. He stole on deck with the wariness of a thief. The land was near—or at least, so he judged. The obscure wall of trees seemed almost at hand. The *Gray Wing* would be under weigh again soon. And there was the thought of encountering Captain Hogg

again, and witnessing the extinction of his mental light and the letting loose of evil spirits.

There was no one in sight as he stepped to the rail. He placed one foot and then the other outside the rail. He leaned far out. He thrust out vigorously with his arms so that his body fell clear of the vessel. He plunged down into the dark waves.

CHAPTER X

HOW VICTORIANO FINDS A LIGHT IN A DARK PLACE AND HOW HE OPENS A DOOR

HE climbed a broken, natural stairway of stone and set his feet on the earth. His breath was labored, his lungs hurt him. The distance had been greater than he had thought and he was not an expert swimmer.

He stood erect when he had found a level footing and tried to look about him. He could see nothing, so dense was the darkness. It was not only that night had fallen. The clouds had descended, too. A dense fog enveloped the island. He could feel a kind of ghostly moisture brushing his face and neck.

Then he began to experience a sensation which he could not at all have analyzed. It was as if he had set foot on a haunted island, a place of furtive and spectral agencies. It seemed to him that he was being rejected by a place, just as a man may be rejected by men. The ground on which he stood would have none of him. The air which stirred was inimical to him. The invisible sky knew him not.

He stood in indecision, trying to think. He had been on board the *Gray Wing* a long time, for months. There had been time to reach earth's remotest point. Where was he? He felt the alien nature of the place. His heart hungered for home. He moved forward, urged by a troubled spirit of inquiry.

His progress immediately thereafter was one of the astounding experiences of his life. He instantly en-

tered a region which was prodigal, disorderly, with forms of vegetable life. He scarcely knew the word, but he was in a jungle. Grasses and vines clogged his feet; dripping fronds with sharp edges smote him in the face. A third stratum of green growth topped huge tree-trunks which his fingers occasionally found. He was in a place of spongy earth, pathless, black, desolate. Strange, subtly disturbing odors were in his nostrils. He was presently submerged in that jungle as wholly as if waters had arisen all about him. He was hopelessly lost.

It began to rain, and his one purpose was to find some kind of natural shelter where he might wait for daylight. He pressed forward, stumbling, repeatedly falling, constantly buffeted by dripping boughs. The blackness became intensified, the rain beat more heavily. The noise of the rain became deafening as it beat upon the green drums all about him. He could see nothing. That was the thing that dismayed his soul: the blackness of this strange world.

There was a path, after all. His feet found it. He moved less deliberately, thrusting one foot forward after another, feeling his way. He lost the path. It must have turned. And now he was afraid to go forward. A path does not turn unless there are impassable places ahead: pitfalls, perils. His desert lore informed him of this. He sank down where he stood, afraid to advance, deciding to wait where he was for day. He sat, dripping and subdued, his hands clasped about his knees. He began to count the minutes; he counted until they ran into hours: one hour, two hours, three.

And then suddenly his unseeing eyes opened wide, staring incredulously; his brain leaped from its lethargy. In that lost region of chaos and blackness he perceived

a light. Before him, only a few yards away, a beam shone from under a closed door.

He arose and plunged forward, skeptical and also a little fearful. Surely he had not really seen a light! Yet it seemed that he had done so. Some sort of structure arose like a shapeless smudge before him. He felt his way, both hands outstretched, his head a little back. His fingers came into contact with some sort of rough thatch dripping with water. He felt about: the rough thatch framed a wooden door. He sought for a latch, a knob; but immediately he thought better of his intention of entering unannounced. He knocked on the door, holding his ear close, listening.

A voice, seemingly a long way off, responded with an odd effect of tranquillity—in English:

“Come in.”

He found a latch now. He opened the door. The wind swept furiously into the house, imperiling the flame of a lamp. He slipped quickly into the house and closed the door behind him.

He did not at all grasp the strangeness of the miracle which had been wrought for his sake. He was merely puzzled, as children are puzzled by forces outside their grasp. He was looking down upon a little old man in a skull cap, seated at a table which held the lamp. About the room were stuffed birds, gaudy of hue, perched with a kind of frozen vivacity on artificial limbs. Here a crimson wing was poised for flight; there a green tail had been arrested in the act of twitching. He stood close to a group of tiny feathered creatures of an uncanny, still cockiness, of a much too perfect alertness. A red and green cockatoo with shining eyes looked down upon him from a nearby perch. An immense heron, which should have known no kinship with the cockatoo, stood on one leg musing

undisturbed. Three minute specimens, birds of one family, yet each a trifle different from the other—variations on the same ornithologic theme—remained with their backs to him, demurely ignoring him, as if his grossness did not matter to them. They were almost incredibly delicate.

He perceived at once that these were not living birds. They bore an obvious and fell relationship to the old man at the table, with his pinched face and passionate eyes and that laboratory cap with its indefinite suggestion of heartlessness.

The old man looked at Victoriano with an effect of habitual amiability, yet with no very genuine goodwill.

"Excuse me a moment," he said in a slightly impatient manner—the manner of one who has been interrupted in a pressing and wholly congenial task. He had the skin of a bird on the table before him. There was also on the table a quantity of plaster and a sack of salt which had been partly spilled. The plumage on the birdskin was of an Oriental gorgeousness. "I've thought best to saponify this specimen," he said with a kind of nimble utterance, digging his shining glance into the thing he held in his hands. "A true *dasy-crotapha speciosa*. Its like is scarcely to be found in any collection in America."

He seemed to be addressing himself rather than his visitor. Indeed, he seemed not really to have grasped the fact as yet that he had a visitor. He was as one dreaming, or at least as one completely rapt. He spread the birdskin on the table before him, plumage up, and recited a kind of ritual of identification: "Head crested; forehead with dense plumes covering the base of the maxilla . . . tuft on the side of the base of mandible . . . post occipital plumes yellow; an irregular band across the throat black, dorsal feathers gray

with light olive-green tips and white shafts; uropygium yellowish green; upper tail-coverts the same, tinged with rufous . . ."

Suddenly he started and fixed his amazed glance on Victoriano. "Bless my soul, where did you come from?" he demanded.

"I came on a ship that just passed," said Victoriano.

The other man seemed to weigh this, as if it were strange, perhaps a bit incredible. "And why did you come?" he asked after a pause.

"I was just looking around," said Victoriano. He glanced about the room not too inquisitively.

"Quite so!" said the other with an air of complete acceptance. "Sit down."

He put aside the task on which he had been engaged. "My name is Burriss," he added. "Professor or Doctor or Edward Burriss. Either will suffice." He reached for a pot of mutton tallow on a shelf behind him. "I'll call it a day's work." He put a bit of the mutton tallow on his hands and began rubbing it in gently. The skin of his hands showed numerous slight abrasions. "Sometimes it's rather rough work, getting about in the jungles," he explained. "And I have to keep my hands fit." He regarded his hands thoughtfully. "I have to keep them quite free from oils when I'm at work, you see. Oils of all sorts are the arch-enemy to my craft. But I like to soften them up at night."

Victoriano had located a chair, but some sort of monster-barreled rifle lay across it, and a heap of large bullet-like objects made of skins.

"Ah, just put those things—anywhere!" said Burriss.

Victoriano freed the chair of its encumbrances. As he sat down he inquired a little drily, "Where did *you* come from?"

"From California. From the University—though I'm working on my own initiative now. I've been here six months. I've nearly finished. There are a few migrant specimens which appear here in a month or so, I'm told. I've thought of waiting for them. There are other things I can do in the meantime. But I think my collection is comparatively complete, though I hope to get a better specimen of the *zosterornis striatus*—a new species. I've secured one, but it was necessary to use an ordinary bullet and it was slightly damaged."

Victoriano reflected and said at length: "Birds."

Burriss gazed at him blankly. Presently he sighed and said: "Quite so." He waved his hand toward a shelf containing heaps of birdskins which were like incredibly precious fabrics. "I'll mount them when I get them home," he said. "I've mounted the few you see here just for pastime." He now devoted his attention to his hands, which he rubbed softly and rhythmically.

"You—kill them?" asked Victoriano.

Burriss started slightly. "How else?" he demanded.

"How?" asked Victoriano.

"I prefer to use water globules." He nodded toward the grotesque rifle and the soft missiles of skins which Victoriano had removed from the chair on which he sat. "The risk of damage is less. The birds are only stunned and may be caught—if you're sufficiently nimble." He added the concluding words humorously, with a faintly malicious smile. "Sometimes you have to use ordinary bullets of small caliber. Sometimes you trap them. There are many ways. The natives are very cunning."

Victoriano caught at that word *natives*. He should want to know about that presently. But now he asked:

"You came all the way from California just to kill birds?"

Burriss considered. "To contribute to a fascinating science," he said. "Consider: when the twenty-eighth volume of the Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum is published—there are only twenty-seven volumes now—it will contain my name and a description of a new specimen of the subfamily micropodinae, genus tachornis. Think of it!—a monument to me that will endure when the Tower of London and the Statue of Liberty are dust on every wind that blows. Yes, I've come all the way from California. I'd walk the distance, twenty times over, if there were no other way."

The two men regarded each other almost inimically: at least from across barriers of incentive and purpose which created an essential estrangement between them. They could never have become acquainted, really. Then Victoriano's glance moved on to the adjoining room, where he noted a litter of things, an incredible jumble. There was an odor which began to be distasteful to him. He could not imagine himself as resting, as relaxing, in such a place. It occurred to him that his coming in had been an intrusion. He arose uncomfortably. "Well, I'll be getting along," he said. For the moment he had forgotten the desolation without. "Good-night," he added.

"Good-night," said Burriss absently. But suddenly he started up and hurried to his door, upsetting things on the way. He called out imperatively—"Wait! Come back! God bless my soul, where are you going?"

Victoriano turned back. He did not reply. He was too much amazed by the other's awakening, by his newly revealed normal emotions.

"You know you can't wander away like that," con-

tinued Burriss. "Upon my word—how did you say you got here? A ship? Most extraordinary, I assure you. At any rate you'll not find another to take you away—not to-night. Not this month, nor this year, more than likely. And there's nowhere else for you to go to-night."

"How far am I from the nearest town?" asked Victoriano.

"The nearest town? The man is mad! There aren't any towns. There's nothing. You're on the island of Bongao. It has a population of—well, it's impossible to say. They're like lizards, or fishes. There are perhaps a few hundreds of them. No more. They're a more or less amphibious nomad, clad chiefly in a yard of flaming calico and a knife and a lust for murder. Come back inside immediately."

It was a new tone, a new language—or a new jargon. Victoriano partly comprehended. He reentered the hut. "No towns?" he asked.

"Not a bit of it!"

Victoriano reflected. He recalled that word, *natives*. "And the people: would you say they are mischievous?"

"Quite. Quite."

"How do you get along, then?"

"Well—they think I'm mad."

Victoriano thought that might be a point in the natives' favor. He sat down in indecision.

"You must spend the night with me," continued Burriss. "To-morrow I may be able to take you before the Datto and suggest to him delicately that you too are mad. You may share my hut with me until there's a chance for you to get away. Sometimes there's a vessel from Sandakan. By the way, where do you wish to go?"

"To San Francisco," said Victoriano.

"Yes, naturally, in the end. But I meant, where do you wish to go from here?"

"I want to get back to San Francisco as soon as I can."

"You mean you've looked around enough?"

"That's it."

"So. Well, at Sandakan you'd be more in touch with things. You might find your way out within a few months, even if you had first to go to Singapore, or even to Manila, or Hong Kong. I dare say things are not as bad as they might be. In the meantime you'd better attach yourself to me. We can make it appear that you're helping." After an interval he added in amazement, "You're all wet!"

"It was raining," said Victoriano, preferring not to explain how he had left the *Gray Wing*.

"Of course. Well, you must look out for jungle fever. You must hang those things up. I'll make a place for you to sleep."

He assumed a bustling air now. He went into the adjacent room and Victoriano heard him moving things about. Presently he uttered a faint exclamation. He reappeared, crestfallen.

"What is it?" asked Victoriano.

"I forgot my supper." He shook his head whimsically. He went to a cupboard made of an American pine box, taking from it a plate containing baked fish. He found another dish heaped with fruits. From both dishes he flicked a few ants. He ignited a tiny oil stove and placed coffee on to heat. In response to Victoriano's natural glance of inquiry he explained: "I was too busy to think of it." And then, "Oh!—my native servant. A very bright and capable boy. He prepared the fish."

Victoriano nodded. He was pleased to think of the

natives as serving, as being bright and capable. That might make a difference to him before long.

"Will you join me?" asked Burriss, glad not to have forgotten his duty as a host. But Victoriano declined.

They lay down side by side in Burriss's bed—an affair of native workmanship—a little later; and in the darkness Burriss talked of the natives. "They're not as bad as I pictured them, no doubt," he said. "There is a good deal of human nature in them. They have their zealots, unfortunately. One finds them everywhere. And their zealotry is likely to take shocking turns. They run amuck, as the saying is, and slay in a manner more effective than ingenious. But the normal members of the tribe are very much like other folk: they love pleasure and leisure and liberty, they know what kindness is, and even deference, in rudimentary forms. And they are very human in their interest in travelers. In your case you will find them ready to give of their best, very likely—unless you violate some of their prejudices or rules. You'll have to feel your way about a bit. They'll soon discover that your intentions are friendly. You'll have to keep your eye open for individuals of peculiar brain formations—of a cerebral restlessness—their zealots. You'll be taking your chances, just as we all do at home and elsewhere."

He paused a moment and then, in a different tone: "I must show you a perfect specimen of the *strix whiteheadi* in the morning—of the family *aluconidae*. It varies slightly from type: middle toe pectinate; ruff around eyes and across throat fully developed; primaries much longer than secondaries; proximal half of tarsus fully feathered; distal half. . . ."

But the last sound Victoriano had heard was the jungle wind, swirling midway between dark seas, hissing through nodding fronds and roaring in tall ilang-

ilang trees. He dreamed of the desert and of a hospitable ranchhouse thousands of miles away, and a girl named Fidesia. Into his dream came words imperatively uttered: *Keep her in your mind so close that if she stirs in the night you'll reach out in your sleep and hold to her.*

He started up with a cry of dismay. He must go home! He had no right to wander. The light of dawn filled the room. He heard a furtive tapping at Burriss's outer door.

CHAPTER XI

HOW VICTORIANO IS WAITED UPON BY A RULER
ATTENDED BY WARRIORS AND HOW AMICABLE
MATTERS ARE DISCUSSED

HE dressed quietly, hopeful of not waking Burriss. The tapping at the door was not repeated. He emerged from the hut with all his curiosity alive. What sort of place was this that he had chanced upon?

He beheld a world of brilliant green, touched by the sun, yet wet with the rain: a gigantic garden waste and wild. He caught glimpses of a blue and silver sea through rifts in the trees. A smart wind was blowing.

Near at hand he perceived something else. Three human beings were squatting before the hut, waiting with inscrutable faces for Burriss to appear. The tapping on the door was explained. They were boys—or men, perhaps. More likely men, though they were very small. They were naked, save for loin-cloths. Their breasts were muscular and seemingly as tough as whipcord. Their legs and arms were like steel. Their beardless faces were firm, of definite outlines, spare: not at all boyish. Their expressions were stoical, a little stolid. They were of the color of the *Indios* of the Rio Grande country. They manifested no surprise when Victoriano emerged from the hut, drawing a deep breath and yawning before he espied them squatting in a row on the ground, like gods. It would have seemed that the hut was so complete a mystery to them that a little more or less of mystery did not matter.

Victoriano withdrew his attention from the three natives. After all, they could scarcely matter to him. The spectacular wilderness did not matter. He must get back home. Nothing mattered to him save a girl whom he must claim. The thought of Ramon crossed his mind and his hands slowly clinched. It was because of him, Ramon, that everything had gone wrong. His glance wandered again to where the three natives squatted. He mused somewhat idly: "I wonder where they live?"

Burriss emerged from the hut surprisingly soon. He seemed like a man possessed. He said to Victoriano, in passing, "You'll find things for breakfast: and you'd better keep quiet until I've had a chance to speak to the Datto." Then he was gone, followed by the natives, to one of whom he handed over his rifle and water globules. They all were swallowed up in the jungle as if water had submerged them.

Victoriano returned to the hut and made a sort of breakfast: he found crackers and canned pineapple and chipped beef in jars, and fruit. The coffee in a small pot was still steaming. But he could not remain in the hut. It was so distinctively the habitation of another. He could not even look about him without feeling that he was prying, even meddling in a way. Moreover, he was not interested in the enterprises which had the hut as their center. He felt that he must know something about the island, the better to be able to quit it as soon as possible.

He set forth, warily enough, into the jungle; and immediately he experienced the sensation which had come to him the night before: a sense of something spectral about him. Even the warmth of the tropic morning and the floods of sunlight could not dissipate the feeling. The stillness of a world which seemed

to have been stricken dumb oppressed him. The riotous vegetation bewildered him. He had never conceived anything like it.

Agitated sounds suddenly intruded upon the silence. He lifted his eyes to the long, clean branches of a towering tree. A flock of parrots, arriving from some distant place, were up above. They were birds of a certain awkwardness, with brilliant green feathers, and a pink deepening to terra cotta. They engaged in what might have been taken for an angry conference, all talking together, each a little pompously, as if it alone had anything important to say. They all flew away heavily, as if flying were difficult.

Far less preoccupied and foolish was a tiny, reddish-brown monkey which approached from beyond an immense tree: a creature of incredible littleness and physical humility, there in the boundless amphitheater of green. It grimaced with much exaggeration, shifting its eyebrows, its lips, at sight of a human being. From beneath its bulging little forehead its eyes marveled and inquired. It sprang into the crotch of a bush, grinning viciously and screeching. Then it thought better of this kind of behavior. It made a pitiful little O with its lips, uttering a child-like cry; it elevated its eyebrows as if it were very sad, as if it were about to weep. It sprang to the ground and began searching its body dreamily, as if for fleas. Its glance wandered away pensively, its tiny hand coming gradually to rest. It sprang into the air with incredible alacrity. When it touched earth again it was headed in a new direction. It ran nimbly away, its tail curved proudly, into the jungle.

Victoriano's mental gesture was one of acquiescence. Under all the circumstances the parrots and the monkey did not seem nearly as strange as Burriss. He looked

to see if he could discover where the monkey had gone; then he set forth in a spirit of inquiry toward certain flashes of blue water showing among the trees.

He was startled by the sound of human voices as he approached the shore. He came out upon a low headland. Two little boats were passing. They were of simple construction: hollowed trunks of trees, narrow, yet of great buoyancy. Each was equipped with a sail fixed to a mast which arose from a tripod. Each was also equipped with outriggers: long poles of bamboo flung across bow and stern, with other poles of bamboo connecting their ends on either side of the boat. A youth, an exact duplicate of the youths who had gone away with Burriss, sat in each boat. One of these looked up as Victoriano approached the water's edge. Then both adjusted their sails and swerved away from shore, entering deeper water.

Victoriano watched their sails fill and tug. The sails, he thought, were even more remarkable than the boats. They were of bright colors, of striking designs. The boats were soon far away, moving toward a projecting point of land where other men were assembling in outriggers with brilliant sails. Victoriano reflected: "They are young men like any other young men, liking excitement, maybe getting up games of some kind." He resolved to go among them, later, if he couldn't get away from the island right away. Just now his inclination was to know something about the quieter and more serious ways of life here in this strange place. He thought it would be just the thing if he could come upon some old person, sensible and calm, and have a friendly talk. Not a talk in the usual sense, perhaps, but a parley, conducted principally in pantomime. He could not realize the fact that Burriss knew much about the island, except in a one-sided way.

He meant to find out things for himself. The natives would be able to tell him what he needed to know: where to go to find a ship, and how to get to that place, in case it proved to be far away. He thought the sailboats might prove to be what he'd need.

He wandered away from the shore, into the jungle again. He presently came upon that trail or path which he had struck for a moment the night before. It was quite clearly defined: he could not understand how he had lost it, even in the dark. He now followed it toward the interior of the island. It missed Burriss's hut by a dozen yards or so. It wound away into an incredibly wild region, out of sight or sound of the sea.

Presently Victoriano paused and removed his hat. He dashed the perspiration from his face. He realized that he was very warm and thirsty.

Where, he asked himself, did Burriss get water to drink? There had been two vessels of water ready at hand in the hut that morning: one sweet and cool, to drink; the other salt and bitter, to bathe in. Where had the sweet water been obtained?

His knowledge of desert-craft informed him that paths lead to all things, provided one has faith and patience. He continued on his way, now with the thought of water in his mind.

He discovered a human habitation at last, peeping at him furtively through a rift in dense green foliage: a thatched hut of grasses. He approached watchfully. The hut stood on rather high stilts; a platform of bamboo led to its one door, which was closed. No one was in sight, not a sound was to be heard; yet Victoriano was affected by a sense of something furtive and inimical in that lonely dwelling-place. He proceeded on his way, moving more thoughtfully. Surely,

he argued, he would come presently to a house of less forbidding aspects—touched at least by a path, which might be regarded as a voice of welcome. This first habitation he had found stood apart in the trackless wild, beyond hail, hailing no one.

After a walk of some two hours he came upon a sort of pivotal spot. If the island were a place of volcanic origin, here was the spot from which the maelstrom of prehistoric forces had radiated. There was a wild gorge toward which mighty trees leaned from every direction save one. There were many birds, as in an amphitheater, calling timidly. In one direction there was a deep gully, densely clothed in grasses; and through this gully a stream trickled and flashed.

Victoriano drew close and perceived that from among the rocks a mighty spring bubbled up. He sank to his knees and drank. A brilliant bird, piercing the sun-spotted avenue of the forest, darted down beside him, and then with a spasmodic movement made its escape, crying out affrightedly.

He sat down by the spring and waited, thinking that perhaps some one would come for water; but the solitude remained unbroken. He drank again and at last he retraced the path toward Burriss's hut. From time to time he made little journeys aside, but he encountered no one.

When he arrived at the hut he prepared a meal and ate alone; and later he sat in the doorway, with much to think about and nothing to do. Burriss had said that a ship might not come for a long time: perhaps for months. Very well; he must stop thinking of a ship. Evil results came of thinking about one thing all the time. There had been the case of Captain Hogg. He must resign himself to remaining on the island for

a time. He might have to remain in the hut with the unpleasant odor: but as to this there was a reservation in his mind. Burriss might rather not have him, and he might rather shift for himself. Possibly he might make friends among the natives.

As he sat considering his situation he was startled by the sound of an approach. There were voices not far away, the guttural voices of men speaking a language which was strange to him. A moment later a file of men appeared on that path which led to the spring and to the interior of the island.

It was a most amazing-appearing deputation, including men who were not to be mistaken for persons of rank and importance. There was a singularly impressive old man clad like a crude Harlequin, accompanied by one who walked beside him with ostentatious deference. There were four ancient men with the visages of counselors. There were finally half a score of warriors, marching smartly. The latter carried shields of dried skin and also formidable swords.

Victoriano could not fail to note the extraordinary energy and purposefulness of all these persons. This was an official visit, he felt: an act of the government. He would have smiled, but he checked himself. Better to meet dignity with dignity. He recognized an air of authority in the person of the Harlequin-like garb, and upon him he centered his attention. He arose respectfully.

The deputation came to a halt. The man who had walked with him of the Harlequin-like garb stepped forward and addressed Victoriano with the utmost niceness of intonation. He began with: "You spik Anglais?"

Victoriano replied that he did, and added, "And Spanish."

Those two last words acted like magic. Immediately Victoriano was placed in possession of all the facts: The deputation consisted of the Datto of the tribe, his interpreter, four counselors and a detail of warriors. They had come in a spirit of goodwill, as a matter of form. Having explained these things somewhat parenthetically, the interpreter suddenly became very dignified. Evidently he meant that the interview should be duly impressive. After a pause he began with the question:

"Who are you?"

Victoriano was sure no unfriendliness was implied by this blunt question. The interpreter was now merely the interpreter. The Datto's face supplied the key to the spirit of the situation, and the Datto's face was notably reasonable and kind.

"An American," he replied; and added, "A traveler."

But it appeared that the Datto wished to dispense with the services of the interpreter, now that it had developed that the stranger could speak Spanish. He waved the interpreter aside. "Let us talk together," he said to Victoriano. And he glanced significantly about, as if he were not accustomed to be kept standing.

Victoriano hurried into Burriss's hut, returning quickly with a chair.

His distinguished guest glanced at the chair with a certain wondering aloofness. In the background the interpreter, with affected dismay, flashed a message by means of pantomime.

Victoriano took the chair away and returned with an American blanket, gray with a pale blue line. With the interpreter's delighted aid this was spread on the ground, under a patriarchal palm. The Datto took his position on the blanket, sitting cross-legged with perfect ease, and even with real dignity. The inter-

preter remained standing near at hand. The other members of the party withdrew to a short distance. The Datto graciously indicated that Victoriano was also to sit on the blanket.

After a suitable pause the Datto inquired, "Why are you here?"

Victoriano had no thought but to deal with perfect sincerity with this man. He was unaware that he dealt with a Mohammedan, a Moro. This would have made slight difference to him. He had noted certain amazing externals, including the visitor's dress. This consisted of a tiny jacket of filmy fabric, its length falling a little short of the hips; the ample skirt, like a woman's, of gorgeous cotton print; the twisted head-dress in the Turkish style, this too being of the brightest hues. But the most amazing thing he had observed was that a man so clothed could seem manly and dignified—and this his strange visitor certainly seemed. Moreover, he recognized the Datto's right to question him. He felt that any attempt at evasion would be detected. He replied: "I was on a ship. Three months, four months, on a ship. I was with a man who was not polite. I wished to leave him and go home. I did not know where I was. I hoped to find another ship that would take me home. I jumped overboard at night. I swam ashore."

The Datto nodded. He believed this. He knew he was being told the truth. The picture of a man jumping overboard and swimming ashore took form in his brain. His eyes beamed; he nodded. "When do you expect to go home?" he asked.

"When a ship comes," replied Victoriano; and he asked in his turn, "When do you suppose a ship will come in?"

The Datto replied: "That cannot be foretold." But

moved by an expression of disappointment in Victoriano's eyes he added tentatively, "Maybe six months—a year?" Perhaps he thought that even a year ought not to seem a very long time. He adjusted himself in a more settled position. "I am the Datto of my tribe," he said. "What are you, in your own country?"

"I herd cattle," replied Victoriano.

The Datto nodded. "My father was a Datto," he continued. "What was your father?"

"My father is also a herder of cattle."

"I live in a plain house where virtue is highly esteemed," said the Datto.

"I too live in a plain house, in which strangers are made welcome," said Victoriano.

There were other personal matters to be discussed, and then the Datto asked, "From what country are you?"

"From America."

The Datto had heard of America, he said. It was a land of great cities, too magnificent to be described, in which many persons became fabulously wealthy by defrauding the poor, and in which dwelt large numbers of persons who were too degraded to wash their bodies properly, and too hard-pressed to enjoy anything at all.

Victoriano thought this was an exaggerated statement of the case. There were also plains and mountains where free people dwelt, he said. For his part, he added, he had never dwelt in a city.

There was an interval of silence during which Victoriano wondered how the Datto and his party had known of his presence at Burriss's. He concluded that the men in the boats must have carried information. Then his attention was attracted to the Datto's hands. He was surprised to note that they were covered with abrasions not at all in keeping with his high estate.

He excused himself a moment. Going into the hut, he returned presently with Burriss's pot of mutton tallow. He said quite simply, "Put some of this on your hands. It will do them good." He set his visitor an example by removing a bit of tallow from the pot and applying it to his own hands. He then held forth a quantity of the tallow for his guest's use.

The Datto seemed politely amazed. He seemed to be in doubt as to whether this might not be a social act implying a bond between them. He hesitated almost imperceptibly and then accepted the tallow. He began massaging his hands as Victoriano was doing. He appeared to grasp the real significance of this act presently. Perhaps the tallow had a soothing effect. He betrayed a slight degree of eagerness. When Victoriano arose to take the pot away he looked after it longingly. And when they were both on the gray blanket again the Datto's manner had become somber and silent, as if he had been reminded of a cross.

Victoriano, glancing at him furtively, perceived that his face had become almost haggard; that the childish simplicity of a moment before had given place to a universal expression of dark sorrow.

The distinguished guest did not remain long. He wished to know, presently, when Victoriano would return his visit.

"Would to-morrow be a good day?" asked Victoriano.

"To-morrow is always the best day of all," replied the Datto, beaming graciously. He arose then and prepared to depart. There was a brief murmur of pleasure among his followers at the happy conclusion of the visit. They all went away into the deep forest, the energetic warriors disappearing last of all.

They did not seem absurd to Victoriano. Different

persons had different ways, he reflected. They had wished to be friendly—that was all. And he understood that.

He shook Burriss's blanket out and took it back into the hut. And when Burriss came back to the hut, not long afterward, he informed him of the Datto's visit.

"Quite so," replied Burriss, without having quite heard. He was thinking of something else.

"The poor old man seemed to want your pot of tallow," remarked Victoriano.

Burriss aroused himself. "What?" he asked; "the Datto was here? My pot of tallow? There's a full pot he may have. I brought two."

"I'm to visit him to-morrow," said Victoriano, observing Burriss closely. Would he approve of the step?

But Burriss began to speak in praise of the Datto. "He is a very sensible man," he said. He added, as he made a heap of the water globules he had brought back with him, "You'll be perfectly safe, I assure you. Going and returning, you needn't experience any uneasiness. He has his people thoroughly under control. If anything should go amiss later it will be because of some future development."

Victoriano added finally: "He thinks a ship may not show up for six months or a year."

"Quite likely," returned Burriss, wholly unmoved. He was removing a tiny dead bird from a pouch he carried. He removed the pouch, disarranging his hair as he did so.

Victoriano stood regarding him almost angrily. He thought him a proper-appearing person to remain alone in a jungle six months or a year without caring. As for himself, he was cut from a different piece of goods.

He sat down on the front step so that he could not

see Burriss. With an unwonted weariness of heart he closed his eyes. Familiar trails came before him, and a friendly ranchhouse. But he could not bear to look upon that picture. He arose brusquely and followed Burriss into the hut.

CHAPTER XII

HOW VICTORIANO GOES IN TURN TO VISIT A RULER AND HOW HE IS GIVEN THE FREEDOM OF AN ISLAND

EMISSARIES of the Datto came for Victoriano the next day while it was yet early. They came with pomp: two elderly men attended by four warriors with their shields of hide and each bearing his deadly *kris*. Noting the presence of the warriors Victoriano asked the elders if it was thought dangerous to go abroad without armed attendants.

The question was an embarrassing one. The presence of warriors, he was informed after a pause, was a mark of respect to a guest. Were warriors unknown in Victoriano's country?—and did they not bear arms even on occasions of peace and festivity?

"It is true," replied Victoriano.

Before they set out on their journey one of the elders made known that he wished to ask a question.

When Victoriano waited with a courteous air the old man said: "To ask a favor of one with a generous heart is half a robbery. To ask of one with a mean heart is to invite abuse. Yet the Datto Bagyan beseeches that his guest will bring a gift."

"If I had anything to give!" replied Victoriano with a smile.

"He had something out of a little jar yesterday. He placed a high value upon that which he had out of the little jar. He beseeches that you bring more of that which you gave him."

Victoriano was delighted. "Did it make his hands well?" he asked; and then, "There is a whole jar full he shall have."

"It worked a miracle on his hands," declared the native. "This morning when he awoke his hands were like an infant's, without a blemish."

Victoriano nodded. "I knew it!" he said. He went into the hut and returned with a pot of tallow, which he proffered to the native. It was waved aside, however. The Datto Bagyan would prize it the more if it came directly from the stranger's hands.

They set off then along the path leading inland.

They walked for a time in silence, as if the natives held it to be a proper thing for the first feast of intercourse to be consumed by their chief, leaving the broken fragments of speech to be divided among themselves afterward. They came, after half an hour's walk, to the spring which Victoriano had visited the day before. They then entered what was to Victoriano an unexplored territory.

Grass huts were presently not infrequent; and for some reason which Victoriano did not immediately grasp, these primitive places of abode did not present the inhospitable aspect of that hut which he had previously seen. Individuals made their appearance in the doorways: women and children and occasionally a man. All these were childishly excited. Plainly, white men did not pass their way often.

Presently they came into a region where a part of the ground was under cultivation. There were occasional patches of tobacco. One field of considerable dimensions was covered with a luxuriant growth of vines. These proved to be yams. The field was surrounded by a crude wall of stone; "to keep wild beasts from devouring the yams," Victoriano was informed.

Further information was forthcoming: The yams were wild. Any one might come to the field and dig a supply in the proper season. It was a rule observed by all not to rob the earth of all its crop, but to leave enough to insure the next crop.

Victoriano asked: "But aren't there a few persons who take all they can get?"

Yes, there were, he was informed with a mild gleam of admiration for his shrewdness. Perhaps there were such individuals everywhere, the old man suggested. He added that it was the fate of all men to have to suffer more or less at the hands of greedy persons. But fortunately, he added, there were enough yams for all.

They came at length within sight of the sea at the other end of the island. Victoriano's eyes beamed. There was a sprinkling of huts along the shore, and many boats hauled up on the beaches, and other evidences of a community life. The brilliant sunlight fell on a group of little naked children playing in the sand. They had made a collection of what proved to be marvelous seashells. They were very like the children of any other land or shore in their love of beauty: and this was a discovery which comforted Victoriano strangely.

They descended toward a hut which seemed not specially unlike all the other huts; but now Victoriano was detained a moment. One of those who accompanied him said to him with a certain backwardness: "It is a very good thing that you should bring a gift to the Datto Bagyan, since he has a cross to bear."

Victoriano looked down toward the sunny coast and the hut they were approaching. "A cross to bear?" he asked. He thought he might catch sight of the Datto presently, coming forward to welcome him.

The two elders exchanged significant glances, and

then one of them said, "It has been the Datto's lot to lose a son."

"Ah," said Victoriano. The revelation presented the Datto in a new light: with a wife and family. "I am sorry," he said; and then, "Did the son die only recently?"

There was a moment's silence before the spokesman resumed: "I cannot say that the son is dead. But he had a son, and now he has none. Manu, the son's name was. He was as playful as a mouse, and as skilful. But an evil spirit placed a blemish on him—in what way I never learned. He was seen no more. It was said that he remained in his father's house a long time, though no one saw him. The Sultan sent a physician at last who came and went; and the Datto's house was for a time a house of mourning. It is true that no one saw the son die, nor was there a burial; but one may enter the Datto's house now and perceive that Manu is not there."

Victoriano could think of no reply to make; and they all set forth then, and soon the guest was ushered with much formality into the Datto's house.

He scarcely had an opportunity to note what sort of place he was in. The Datto claimed his entire attention immediately. The Datto had remained inside his house, seated, until his guest appeared in the doorway; then he had arisen ceremoniously to utter words of welcome. He was scarcely the same man Victoriano had met yesterday. Goodwill flowed from his eyes, radiated from his personality. He had been courteous the day before; now he was striving to keep an overpowering sense of gratitude within bounds. He held forth his hands. "They are well," he said.

Victoriano took one of the hands into his own. He shook the hand politely; and before releasing it he held

it up for inspection. It was greatly improved. Countless little fissures were yet to be traced, but the raw surfaces had been healed. "That's good," he said, releasing the hand. Then he made a formal presentation of the pot of tallow he had brought.

It seemed an inelegant gift. There was the name of a famous potted bacon on a label it yet bore. In color the medicament was a dingy yellow. But the Datto's eyes shone as he took the proffered gift. He said simply, in a voice which scarcely indicated the emotion which had shown in his eyes, "I shall repay your gift with such care as your own father would give you if he were here in my place."

Victoriano considered the words. He looked into the Datto's eyes. "Then I shall give you the further gift of loyalty," he said.

He was surprised to find that he could say such a thing. It was unlike him to do so. He reflected: "When one is among strangers he must speak. How otherwise should they understand?"

They sat down together on a grass mat which was of a fineness surpassing anything Victoriano had ever seen before: of an almost incredible delicacy, with an intricate pattern in the weaving of which different colored grasses had been used.

The Datto regarded his guest appraisingly. He said at length: "There are men who utter vain words when they offer a gift of medicine, and put on the ways of magicians."

Victoriano understood that. He smiled slowly, recalling the ways of certain healers he had seen in his own land. "A good medicine may be given plainly," he said. "As for magic, that belongs to nature."

The Datto nodded. "There are men who magnify their gifts," he added.

Victoriano reflected and then replied, "A gift that is acceptable always looks large enough."

Again the Datto nodded. He remained silent for a time: it was his belief that silence may be a sign of pleasure and satisfaction, while words, especially in one who is no longer young, may be a token of embarrassment or of a guilty design. But at length he asked: "Did you know that the man who slays birds was here when you leaped from the ship to swim ashore?"

"No," replied Victoriano. "He was a stranger to me. I found him by chance."

The Datto weighed his next question deliberately before he expressed it: "Do the men of your land delight in taking away the song and the grace of birds, so that they may worship the dead bodies, which are nothing?"

"Where there are many men there are many kinds of men," replied Victoriano.

"He utters heresies," continued the Datto, obviously speaking again of Burriss. "He said to me on one occasion, 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush'—saying this as if it were the word of Allah: yet how clear it is that a bird in the bush belongs to heaven, while one in the hand is of the earth."

"Did you tell him that?" asked Victoriano, a beam in his downcast eye.

"I did not. One sets the feet of children in straight paths, but who shall turn the feet of age out of the wilderness? There was an old man of our tribe who used to say—when he felt the earth quake—'It is Allah slamming the door of Paradise.' And when I explained that this could not be, since Allah's door is never closed to the faithful, he readily agreed that he had uttered a heresy. Yet the very next time he felt the earth quake he would nod with assurance and say,

'It is Allah slamming the door of Paradise.' Old Somkad—that was his name—never gave over making that foolish remark: though he knows now better than I what Allah's ways are, since he is dead."

There was another silence; and then the Datto inquired, "While you remain among us shall you wish to be the guest of the man who slays birds, who is of your own land?"

Victoriano replied, after a moment's thought, "Professor Burriss might prefer to work alone. He has treated me honorably; but as for our being of one land, that does not matter much. Ties between men are fashioned by God, to whom the earth is all one undivided land."

The Datto arose. "If you will," he said, "you shall be at home wherever night overtakes you."

"I have always inclined to that manner of life," said Victoriano.

The Datto went to his door and summoned his interpreter, who was squatting in the shade before his own house near by, waiting to be of service. "Lomofo," said the Datto to the interpreter, "summon the members of the tribe."

Victoriano was amazed by the expedition with which the men of the tribe were brought together. It seemed plain that they had been no further away than the nearest invisible point, waiting for a possible summons. Close to a hundred appeared. They came silently and out of the confusion of the mass they speedily grouped themselves in orderly fashion, always with reference to age and condition. The old men occupied the first line of the group; those of middle age came next, while the young men stood in the rear. There were warriors among them, but these were now without their weapons.

The Datto addressed them briefly, though with impressiveness. "This," he said, beckoning Victoriano to stand beside him, "is our guest, who is to be treated as a brother. Let any one who offers him evil know that he must answer to me."

The words were unintelligible to Victoriano; but Lomofo, the interpreter, rendered them for him, adding, "Now you are at liberty to come and go at will, to ask aid of any man, to look to all alike for guidance."

He felt that the audience was at an end. He stepped out toward the shore, where the children were playing; they had interrupted their play but a moment to stare dubiously at the Datto's house while something was going on there. It was reassuring to note how like they were to other children. He would not approach too close, lest he disturb them. A profound restlessness was upon him—a subconscious inclination to be moving. His interests were not here, really. Something a great way off called to him insistently. Presently he was thinking: "Poor old Captain Hogg regretted, when it was too late, that he hadn't written letters. But that wouldn't help in my case. The ship that would carry a letter will carry me."

He realized that a group of young men had drawn close to him. They were pleasantly excited. There was an obvious rivalry among them to be the first to attract the stranger's attention. He gave way to them, thinking how like those smaller children they were. They escorted him to the long beach where their boats were. When he admired their boats they were delighted. He was unaffectedly pleased with the splendid sails shown him. One which he praised warmly belonged to the boat of Tangka, he was proudly informed—by Tangka himself. Another which he was impelled to declare was not less beautiful belonged to

Moleng; and another, equally marvelous, was the proud possession of Kosmi.

He had some difficulty in communicating with the young men, who had only a few words of Spanish, caught from travelers or from older members of the tribe who had journeyed as far away as Manila, or from Lomofo the interpreter, who had actually attended the University at Manila and who had traveled all over the world—at least in Spain and Arabia and Egypt, as Victoriano afterward learned. However, they understood one another fairly well. There are bonds among young men which are subtler than language. They were all in sympathy with one another. Victoriano admired these dusky, eager fellows who were striving to win his goodwill. Their bodies were perfect, their spirits irrepressible. They were extraordinarily clever: this fact was revealed whenever they touched anything. They were in no way offensive to the eye of a simple person. Their thick black hair was cut short, without nonsense; their eyes danced, their tread was like that of panthers.

On their side, they entertained a lively admiration for Victoriano, who was a more powerful man than any they had ever seen. They openly displayed their curiosity touching his clothing; but this they did in an appeasing manner, with laughter at their own expense, with apologies. One discovered the immensity of his biceps and forearm, and immediately all wished him to give some proof of his prowess. He smiled at them, a little embarrassed. One, bolder and more curious than the others, he invited to relax completely; and this one he lifted on his hand, the body lightly balanced. He lifted him to the full reach of his arm. He lowered his arm and cast the light body dextrously from him a good four yards. The youth alighted on his feet,

breathless, agape—and then laughed with delight. There was a chorus of pleased exclamations.

They took him to where their nets were, and other fishing equipment. He was taken to be shown how the tobacco grew; he was conducted to where the best bananas were: small bananas with thin, spotted skins, and as sweet as honey. After a time a feast was prepared. This consisted of marvelous fish, colored like the rainbow, fresh from the sea, and baked in the open, before a nipa hut, and many kinds of fruits.

The day wore toward its close. He was invited to ride in one of the boats. He shrank from this: the boats seemed so lacking in stability. But he would not confess his uneasiness. He got into the boat of Tangka, which was the largest of all. Tangka, guessing his state of mind, admonished him how to sit: so. Then he hoisted his gaudy sail. The boat went hissing through the little waves, the buoyant outriggers smacking the water alternately on either side. The other young men followed in their own boats. A gay armada was putting out to sea. There were cries of rivalry, taunting yet merry. There was a mishap or two to increase the merriment. They sailed into the sunset; and suddenly the face of the waters was dark.

They turned homeward. The land seemed very far away. Moreover, Victoriano could now see that the island they had quitted—Bongao—was one of a series, spread out over the sea a score of miles. The boats were brought in close to shore, opposite a strange island. This maneuver had been adopted to take advantage of a favoring current. The strange island slipped past; another strange island was gliding by. The island of their home lay ahead, low, obscure. Then the last of the daylight faded and the night had come. The sky filled with stars. The gay party had

spent their exuberant spirits. They sat silent at their sails, gliding homeward.

Presently a word of warning passed from boat to boat. Victoriano strained his eyes to determine the cause. A lone boat, moving laboriously in the opposite direction, was about to pass them.

Tangka whispered cautiously to Victoriano—"It is Datto Bagyan."

He spoke in an awed tone, betraying the fact that it was incomprehensible that the Datto should sail at night, alone.

The Datto's boat was now only a few lengths from Tangka's boat. It would soon be far away. Victoriano caught a glimpse of the Datto's face—or of his attitude. The old man seemed too absorbed to realize that the young men of the tribe were out for a sail—or perhaps this was too common an occurrence to attract attention. He was brooding darkly. His bronze features were stone-like. Yet in that one glimpse Victoriano had caught an impression of subdued rapture.

Later he said warily to Tangka, "Why does the Datto sail alone?"

Tangka faltered over his reply. The Datto had been a famous sailor in his youth, he said evasively. Then he added: "Sometimes the Datto makes a voyage alone to Tawi Tawi."

CHAPTER XIII

HOW VICTORIANO COMES TO DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF OLD FANAKAN THE SILFNT

HE spent that night in Burriss's hut, but it was to be his last night there. The young men of the tribe had decided, the night before, that they would find him a new home. In the morning they came, accordingly, to take him away.

He had not been wrong in concluding that Burriss would part with him gladly. "Of course you'll be in and out," said Burriss. "As for living with the natives, that ought to be interesting, since you've nothing more pressing to do. You might be able to contribute to the sum of human knowledge if you keep your eyes open." He spoke with a kind of cold briskness.

Victoriano avoided his glance: he felt a little ashamed of his fellow-countryman. To him it was scarcely permissible to "keep his eyes open" in a house where one was a guest. To keep one's eyes open for a chance to serve—that was well. But one should keep his eyes closed to weakness, to poverty of any kind, to peculiarity, to misfortune. That was his creed.

The young men had agreed that he should become a son to old Fanakan the widow. That was to say, until a ship came to fetch him. Tangka had suggested this and the others, with significant glances at one another, had concurred. They betrayed much humanity in this matter. They had laughed slyly, because it seemed

that the widow, old Fanakan the Silent, was an almost grotesque person. But they had put an end to their laughter with a feeling of shame, because the old woman was really a good soul, and singularly unfortunate. And she was so ill-favored that a young man might live in her house without scandal.

Who was Fanakan? Victoriano asked the question.

She lived in a hut by herself, weaving mats in order to live. She had had a husband and two sons. She had also possessed two eyes, long ago. Now she possessed neither husband nor sons and only one eye. (But this eye was equal to two, Moleng, a youth with a sense of humor, declared parenthetically.) She had lost an eye when she was young. A bit of shattered bamboo had pierced it. It seemed also that her name had not always been Fanakan. At first it had been Gawani. But she had cried almost constantly when she was a baby, it was related, because it appeared the spirit of the place in which she was born was displeased with the name her parents had given her.

So her name had been changed to Fanakan, said Tangka, who was relating the story. But if she had given over crying it was because in time she had become quite hopeless. Her husband had lost his life. He had been a fisherman, and a cayman had torn him to pieces. Fanakan had witnessed this.

Victoriano's brows contracted. A cayman? What was that?

They explained: It was a vicious fish, occasionally found in the waters round about, which would attack a man fearlessly.

Victoriano glanced away toward the blue water, showing between the fronds of a coconut grove, spread out like fingers. He felt that the sea was an evil thing.

Her sons had grown to manhood, Tangka resumed; but it would have been better if they had not done so. A terrible fate awaited them. Antero, the elder, a youth more beautiful than any other youth of the tribe, had developed a rebellious mind. He had become a *juramentado*. He had gone away to Jolo where for some reason, or for none at all, he had run amuck, and Spanish soldiers had pursued him into the sea, where they had fired a thousand bullets after him. But Liwonan, the younger, had fared even more ill. He had been a morose fellow who liked to observe others from hidden places. He would make friends with no one. One day he had stolen a boat belonging to Lomofo, whose property should have been held specially sacred, and had sailed away by night to another island.

Here Tangka's narrative was suspended inexplicably. Victoriano asked, "And what then?"

"Justice was done," resumed Tangka with a virtuous air. "He was caught, and two incisions, one crossing the other, were made in his abdomen, and his entrails removed."

Victoriano started. He wanted to know about that, but he perceived that a question might lead him upon delicate ground. The faces of all his companions had become stolid. He scarcely knew what comment to make. Still, he felt he ought not to let the matter pass. "Was it the first time he had stolen?" he ventured to ask.

Yes, it was the first time, so far as anybody knew.

"Wouldn't it have been permitted to forgive him the first time?" he inquired.

This question created amazement. Certainly not, they informed him. "The first theft is a greater offense than the second," Tangka explained. "The first

theft is a crime against oneself as well as one's neighbor, but the second is an offense only against one's neighbor, since one no longer has a good name to lose."

"And so," Tangka resumed more lightly, "Old Fanakan was left alone."

They all went with an air of festivity to the house of Fanakan, deep in the jungle. Her door was open but she was not visible when the young men approached her house. They gathered about her door; and seeing her within, Tangka acted as spokesman. "We have brought some one to keep you company," he said, looking without disrespect at the old woman. He signaled Victoriano to approach and stand beside him.

Fanakan, seated on the floor, was working on a large mat. She looked up unmoved; she resumed her weaving.

Victoriano regarded her curiously. She seemed sullen. She wore a scant waist and a skirt of cheap pina cloth. Her withered breasts were visible. Her black hair was bound in a small knob on her crown. She was barefooted and her feet were lean and scarred.

"Go in," said Tangka to Victoriano.

Victoriano remained an instant unmoved. Then he asked, "May I come in?"

She did not reply. A pathetic timidity appeared through the veil of sullenness.

"Go in," said Tangka.

As Victoriano stepped across the threshold, taking care not to tread on the mat she was weaving, the young men withdrew, speaking among themselves a little excitedly, in covered tones. They were soon out of sight and hearing.

Victoriano chose a place over against the wall, where he sat down. To cover her embarrassment Fanakan arose and looked about her for something. She found

it: an amazing cigar on a ledge. It was as large as five or six cigars, and very black and rough. She had made it herself. She had bound it about the middle with a bit of hemp fiber to hold it together. It had been partly consumed on some previous occasion. She now lighted it with an ember borrowed from a crude earthen stove. She began to smoke furiously.

Her teeth had been sharpened to points; they had been stained a pale red. She sat down to her work again, placing her lighted cigar on a flat stone beside her. Occasionally she held the cigar to her lips, creating a cloud of smoke. She worked furiously. At length she shot a furtive glance at Victoriano, who was caught regarding her, he feared, with a curiosity lacking in compassion or respect.

She did not look at him again for a long time. At length she arose and went to her door where she took critical note of the position of the sun. She turned and put away the mat on which she had been working, placing the materials for weaving into the finished fabric and making a loose roll. Now that she had made room for complete freedom of movement she set about preparing food. She brought fagots for the fire. She poured coconut oil into an iron vessel; she sliced plantains and placed them in this, and put the vessel on the stove. An appetizing odor filled the room. Presently she placed the fried plantains on a wooden dish and deposited in the iron vessel a number of fish which she produced from somewhere.

Victoriano watched her silently. At length she approached without looking at him and placed the food before him. She brought implements of wood for him to eat with.

He could not refuse to eat. He scarcely wished to do so. He made a light meal; and when he had finished

he said, "It was good." He arose. "I'll go to the spring for a drink," he said. "Shall I fetch water? Will you find a vessel for me?"

She did not reply. She took up a bamboo pole from which the dividing joints had been ingeniously removed, all save those at the two ends. Near one end there was a small aperture, suggesting a bird-house. She walked past him ungraciously, out of the house, away into the jungle.

He gathered that she did not wish him to go away for the present. He sat down again and furtively examined the mat she had been weaving. He was amazed by the fineness of it. It was very flexible and perfectly accurate.

He was fingering the mat when she returned. The bamboo pole was now dripping wet. From the hole near the end she poured fresh water into a gourd dipper which she handed to him, still without looking at him, still with seeming sullenness.

He drank and said "Thank you," and then he went away. There was something he wanted to say to the young men of the tribe.

They gathered about him eagerly when he appeared among the huts by the shore. It was plain their minds were filled with curiosity, perhaps with doubt. They looked into his eyes searchingly. It was Tangka who ventured to ask at last, "Well, what did she say?"

"She didn't say anything," replied Victoriano, in the tone of one who makes a damaging admission.

They were overjoyed. They looked at one another significantly. Moleng, who had been bailing out his boat, came running up from the beach to learn the news.

"She didn't say a word to him," said Tangka to Moleng, who smiled cheerfully.

Tangka explained why they were pleased. "If she had spoken to you it would doubtless have been to berate you—to drive you away. She has a tongue! She can say more in three words than even Lomofo can say in ten. If she said nothing that meant you were welcome to share her house."

Then Victoriano came to the matter of his visit. "But I cannot share her house with her at night," he said.

There were murmurs of disappointment and surprise. Why could he not?

"She has only one room," said Victoriano, without ceasing to gaze fixedly at one and then another.

"But she is old," protested Tangka.

"And has only one eye," added Moleng in his somewhat maliciously humorous manner.

Victoriano said simply: "One cannot accept food and shelter without giving respect." And because of the suspended decision in the eyes about him he added, "One must consider an old person more than another."

Why was that? Tangka wanted to know.

"Because," said Victoriano, "an old person is often ill, or unhappy, or unable to sleep soundly. As for an old woman, it is likely that she wears a mask by day, which she puts aside at night in order to rest. No one ought to spy upon her."

Moleng's manner became decisive and vigorous. He was an intelligent youth, despite his gay and nervous manner. "We can build another room to Fanakan's house," he said.

They all set out immediately to do this. Of bamboo they made a framework; they made a thatch of fronds and grass. This they did with no tools but sharp knives. They made an outer door as well as one opening into Fanakan's original room.

It was evening when the work was done. Old Fanakan had paid no attention at all. She had been engaged in cooking rice. However, a cloud passed from her one eye when she understood what was being done, and a gleam succeeded it. She had not a word to say to the young men of the tribe, who finally went away excited and happy, having done a good deed. They walked with energy and a pattering noise of speech. Their going suggested a flock of birds.

When they were gone old Fanakan stole silently and almost timidly into the new room. She stood pondering. She understood without being informed why her guest wished this room built. She was deeply gratified. She brought a new mat and placed it on the floor of the new room. This was to be her guest's bed. She returned almost excitedly to the stove, examining the rice with fastidious care.

That night after supper, when it became dark, old Fanakan lighted a wick which drew from a jar of coconut oil. There was now a dim light in the house in the jungle, and heavy shadows without. She sat down and mused. She had not yet uttered a single word.

Victoriano glanced at her shrewdly. At length he said: "The mats you weave are very fine. You are perhaps the most clever woman of the tribe."

She looked at him now, austere and reproachfully, as though he had mocked her. "Does a clever woman live alone," she asked, "and have no man's voice in her house?"

He was touched by her voice, now that he had heard it at last. It was deep and vibrant, besides being bitter. He searched his mind for images she would comprehend. "Misfortune is like a bird, mother," he said.

"It alights upon a house by chance, without inquiring what merits they have who dwell in the house."

Her brows contracted stormily. "Call me not mother," she said, "unless you would come to an evil end. There were two who called me mother, and a day came when they called me in vain." But just the same she looked at him again, less forbiddingly now: indeed, with admiration in her glance for the somber kindness of his face and the power of his body. "You know I have been unfortunate?" she added sharply.

He did not wish her to know that the young men of the tribe had related her story without reticence. "Yes," he said, and he lifted his hand to his eye, meaning that he had noted her loss.

She stared almost contemptuously. "That was nothing—nothing at all," she said. "But I had three other eyes"—her voice sank to a chanting sound—"I had three other eyes through which I used to behold Paradise. And where are they now?"

She lapsed into a dark silence which he would not disturb. There was no sound save the hissing of the wind in the dry grasses of the hut. Through the open doorway the blackness of the jungle was like a curtain.

Victoriano arose silently and went into his own room, dimly illuminated by the light which still burned beside old Fanakan. He looked all about him. The different shades of green of bamboo and frond and grass were cool and restful. Immaculate cleanliness was there. He liked the absence of furniture. The sight of the mat which was to be his bed filled his mind and bones with a pleasant languor.

He went to the doorway and looked at old Fanakan. "Good night, mother," he said.

She lifted her face, startled, coming back from some

far-off place, it would have seemed. She reached for her cigar, which she lighted awkwardly. She puffed three times, audibly.

"Good night," she said.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW VICTORIANO, SLEEPING IN THE HOUSE OF OLD FANAKAN, FINDS EVIL SPIRITS FOR COMPANIONS

HE had no sooner composed himself for slumber than he realized that the spirit of peace and rest was not as yet upon that house. He heard old Fanakan moving furtively.

He tried to believe that this was not at all strange. She was old, and therefore she would be a victim of that restlessness which impels old persons to take a thousand precautions before retiring for the night. That she moved almost noiselessly seemed easily explained. This was out of consideration for him.

However, he could not believe that his disturbed state was traceable to any habitual frailty on the part of the old woman in the next room. The jungle silence—so different from the desert silence to which he was accustomed—was singularly disturbing. It was charged with strange, nameless odors; it was accompanied by an impenetrable obscurity which held a thousand strange forms and colors. Yet he concluded at length that the cause of his unrest—whatever it was—lay close at hand; that it was related to certain faint vibrations indicating stealthy movement near by.

Repeatedly he was at the point of losing consciousness—and then he became fully aroused without knowing what had aroused him. He sat up and listened intently. He was sure he could hear the old woman moving about warily, like a thief. Silence would fall

again; after long effort at concentration he would be dozing—and then the same distressing process would be repeated. There would be the creaking of a timber; the rustle of a skirt, perhaps. His senses became abnormally acute. It seemed to him at length that he could hear the old woman breathing uneasily, as if she were excited.

Was she afraid of him? Was she suffering precisely the same vague unrest which kept him awake? For a moment he was inclined to believe this; and he marveled at the dark power of the night, which can transform commonplace things into strange things and clothe them in mystery. But, after all, it did not seem credible that she should fear him. Why should she? On the other hand, she had seemed to derive a secret if sullen pleasure in having him as a guest. He had been able to read that in her behavior.

By a strong effort of will he rejected a troubled state of mind; he became tranquil; he was slipping away into a condition of oblivion. Then he returned to a full and agitated consciousness. He was positive he had heard her breathing; and he was equally sure that she was not sleeping. Her breathing lacked the rhythm of sleep. It was short, even a little agitated.

He sat up in his place and suppressed a yawn. It seemed useless to try to sleep. He arose stealthily and went to his door. He stood for a moment looking out into that dense world which faced him, which was as black now as it had been green a few hours ago. It seemed forbidding, sinister. He stood looking at it, frowning. What had come over him? He had never known the nameless pains of insomnia before. He had always slept like a log, as he would have said. There were few things in the world that he feared. What was wrong with him now?

He stepped out into the jungle. He approached one specially obscure region after another, touching the palms, walking among them. It was so that one corrected the troubled whims of a horse: one compelled him to perceive that what he feared was really not fearful. He made a considerable circuit, and at length he approached the hut again.

He looked just in time to see old Fanakan appear hurriedly in her doorway. He approached closer. She stood in an attitude of defiance, he thought. He got the impression that she was deeply agitated. He stood at a distance confronting her. And then—oddly enough—her attitude began to express a different emotion. He thought she seemed relieved. She disappeared.

He remained in his place a moment, trying to recapture his hold upon realities. He could not wholly escape the thought that he was dreaming. Old Fanakan did not reappear; there was no sound of movement in the hut.

He returned to his own door, moving briskly, as if the situation had nothing of unusualness in it. He was determined to be done with all nonsense now. He would go to sleep. And indeed he did so; but here again he was destined to pass through a new experience. He slept, but he had never known such disturbed sleep before.

Somewhere between the conditions of waking and sleeping a succession of clear pictures, sad and forlorn pictures, filled his mind, and even after he was sound asleep these pictures continued to look down upon him. He could not determine afterward which of them belonged to moments of waking and which to the period of sleeping and dreaming. He only knew that late in the night he felt a victim to a kind

of uneasiness and despair which he had never experienced before. He thought of certain familiar and lovely things with the relinquishment of one who, grown old, recalls his youth.

He thought of his father's house and of the deserted ranges surrounding it; of the meek, bewildered cattle that had nearly perished, and which had been sent away to a strange place. He thought of his mother: of her patience, of her submission to hardship, of her silent, unremitting labor. He could see her as she used to regard him a little dreamily, with an untroubled sense of possession, with a placidity which enabled her to dispense with words. He thought of her loneliness. He could picture her standing in the doorway of his room, noting that he was not there. He realized that she could have no assurance that he would ever be there again.

He thought of Fidesia, gone away to strange lands to which he could not follow her even in fancy. Many a day must pass before her return; and her dog, Diana, would lie on the veranda, lifting her head at every sound and resuming her troubled slumber after a mute and questioning gaze toward the empty trail.

And then he thought of Ramon. Unconsciously he clenched his hands when he thought of Ramon. It was clear that it was Ramon who had turned the current of his life out of its pleasant channel. If Ramon had never appeared all would have been well. Fidesia would have known her own heart well enough but for the fact that this happy youth with unfamiliar words and ways had disturbed her. She need never have gone away from her home. And now Ramon would remain in her life even though she had gone far from him. He would know how to write fascinating letters, cleverly designed to magnify his ad-

miration of her, to picture and prove his fitness for her. Was it not true that Fidesia had always derived the most inexplicable delight from the letters she had received? They were magical things, letters. He knew that well.

He could have cursed the man who had changed everything, who seemed destined to rob him of the prizes of life. He could have cursed himself because he had not managed better, more as other men would have managed. He should have taken matters into his own hands. He should have prevented Ramon from approaching Fidesia. There would have been ways of doing this.

He was aroused by a soft light in his eyes. The dawn had come. He would have stirred, but his movement was checked by a puzzling discovery. The door between his room and old Fanakan's was slightly ajar. Not only was it ajar, but it was held so by a fagot which had evidently been placed with the studied purpose of preventing the door from swinging shut. The old woman was sitting inside her room, close to that partly-open door. She sat so that she commanded a view of her own outer door as well as that door into Victoriano's room. She was sound asleep, but even so there was something sentinel-like and vigilant in her attitude. Victoriano had the odd thought that she had gone to sleep with at least one ear open. It was only her body that was propped against the wall, relaxed and slumbering. It would have seemed that her spirit remained on watch. She seemed extraordinarily forlorn, yet a little comic; old and broken yet unbeaten. Her head nodded slightly with each breath.

Then a most extraordinary thing happened. The

old woman sprang to her feet, terribly awake, staring in terror about her.

What had awakened her? The mere fact that Victoriano was awake? Was there that in her primitive senses which responded to negative agencies? Had she been aroused only because Victoriano's rhythmic slumberous breathing had changed its rhythm? Or—yet more mysterious thought—had she been awakened because one not asleep was near?—one whose thoughts, though not his hands, touched her questioningly?

She whipped sleep and perhaps an ugly vision from her one keen eye. With a wasp-like gesture of displeasure she withdrew the fagot and closed the door.

It was not in Victoriano's nature to laugh at that which he did not understand. Rather he marveled and frowned. What was the meaning of that vigilance and terror?

He arose thoughtfully and went to his door. He stood looking out into the jungle, the despotic jungle which knows no restraints, which must be constantly combated if it is not to seize everything within its reach. Was there a spirit of evil among those encroaching green forms with their all-enfolding shade, with their everlasting furtive advance, slow and silent, yet relentless? Was the old woman afraid of that jungle which she knew so well? Was nature to her terrible and cruel, rather than beautiful and generous?

He was certain of only one thing: that he had become infected with the vague spirit of terror which hovered in and about old Fanakan's house. The law of reaction was not clear to him. He was not sure whether his own disturbed state was the cause or the effect of the old woman's unrest. He would have

been more likely to believe that he and his companion were alike the victims of agencies which were perfectly natural, if they could be got at: an intoxicating odor, it might be, liberated by the dews and night air; a subtle poison in the withering grasses and fronds of which his room had been constructed; a pestilential vapor from the sodden earth.

At any rate, he had had enough of the hut for the present. He emerged from his door and wandered aimlessly away into the wilderness.

His thought was that perhaps he should decide not to return to Fanakan's hut. More than one alternative course was open to him. He might ask the young men of the tribe to find a lodging for him elsewhere. He might even ask them to build him a house of his own. Or he might go back to Burriss.

But only a little reflection enabled him to perceive objections to all these courses. He did not wish to ask aid of the young men. He recalled something secret and perhaps maliciously humorous in their manner when they had decided to quarter him with old Fanakan. He had been puzzled by this at the time. Now he wondered if the young men had kept something secret from him. Did they know the old woman for a restless or suspicious or perhaps unbalanced creature? Had it been their thought to put their guest's courage to the test by choosing for him an uncanny hostess?

He was inclined to believe this; and his instant resolution was to triumph over them. He would not admit to them that he had been uncomfortable, as he should have to do if he asked to be provided with other quarters.

As for Burriss, he could not help recalling the mild yet unmistakable joy with which he had welcomed the

announcement that Victoriano was to be taken off his hands. The old man preferred to be alone: that seemed clear. Therefore it would be unmannerly to return to him.

But there was yet another reason, stronger than all, against the plan of abandoning Fanakan. To Victoriano's chivalrous mind there came the thought of her age and lonely condition, and the belief that she was in some strange way menaced. He could not believe it was himself she feared. It was something of which he knew nothing. Something imaginary, possibly. But before he had proceeded far in his wanderings he had come to the conclusion that he would stick to the hut to which he had been assigned. If perils hung over the old woman he would be there to take a hand when they developed.

He returned for breakfast, assuming a brisk, purposeful manner. He would have brought fresh water from the spring, but the old woman had forestalled him: the bamboo pole, leaning in a corner, was cool and dripping with fresh water.

She placed breakfast before him, moving stolidly, refusing to meet his glance. The atmosphere of the hut had become normal. Whatever last night's specter had been, it was now gone. Victoriano mused with conviction, and with relief: "Whatever she fears, it is not I." It was, he concluded, something connected with the night. Possibly the night itself.

However, if the hut had regained its normal tone, Victoriano had not done so. Something of his dreams of the night, something of his recognition of the spirit of fear which compassed him about, remained to vex him. He felt a measure of ill will toward the young men of the tribe, who, he felt, had somehow tricked him. He felt ill disposed toward Burriss, who

had been glad to get rid of him. Perhaps it is more significant and accurate to say that on that morning he felt, for the first time in his career, bitterness toward life itself.

He took counsel with himself. What was he to do? There was nothing but to wait for a ship, and then to escape. In the meantime, he would keep apart as much as possible. His own peace of mind, and perhaps his safety too, depended upon a sort of independence, upon keeping clear of the childish men of the tribe, between whom and himself there were so many points of variance.

He spent that day in exploring the interior of the island. Far in the interior he found a wild expanse where a high hill arose above a small plain covered with grasses which were perpetually green, of an everlasting growth. He pushed his way through these grasses, from which a vapor-like dust was released by his touches, filling his lungs and eyes. More than once he stopped, his lungs and eyes smarting; but he would not turn back until he had attained the summit of that high hill before him. After waiting for the fine dust to settle and for his lungs to fill with pure air, he pushed on.

He ascended the hill, sweat dripping from him, his breath coming in gasps. It was very warm. But suddenly he forgot his physical discomfort. He had come to the summit of the hill and he found himself in strange company. He had come within the silent precincts of the island's dead. Before him were graves, some of which were marked by white pennons affixed to bamboo masts. These were there to keep evil spirits away from the dead, he was afterward informed. There seemed a very large number of the graves.

He sat down with a sad sense that even sorrow and burdens do not last long; and soon he felt rested, soothed. No matter how tumultuous and strange the living are, the dead are always blessed. He felt that he could have slept here tranquilly and long; it even occurred to him that it might be good to sleep here for ever and ever.

He looked back over the way he had come. He was startled and electrified by the scene. The sea, rising to the high rim of the horizon, was all about him, blue, abandoned, vital. The land seemed to shrink, to become as nothing, by comparison with the limitless waters. Under the unveiled sun there were flashing colors and crests of white, dark shadows and dancing summits.

It would have been glorious, splendid—if only there had been a ship in sight.

CHAPTER XV

HOW VICTORIANO VISITS THE HUT OF THE MOUNTED BIRDS AND HOW HE MAKES A DISTRESSING DISCOVERY

DURING the succeeding three days and nights his spirit came near to breaking. He saw no one save old Fanakan, and each succeeding night in her hut was like the first, in that a nameless terror was liberated at dusk and hovered near until dawn.

He fought ceaselessly against this condition but he could not conquer it. He tried to comprehend it but he could not. The old woman was the very embodiment of those principles which he had disdained all his life: suspicion, unrest, fear. During the hour of dusk, before he retired—before the door was closed between them—he could not help but be fascinated by her furtive behavior. She sat inside her door, crouching, staring without moving out into the wilderness, like a cat. Or she sat so that she could look inside his room; and while he seldom caught her eye he felt that whenever he turned his gaze away from her she was regarding him intently. She sat smoking and letting her cigar go out. Her mind seemed to be continually shifting. When she relighted her cigar she brought the lighted wick, in its bowl of coconut oil, close to her face. Her pointed teeth, red with betel-nut stain; her keen eye, harboring an evil dream yet hiding it as behind a veil—these filled Victoriano's mind with horror.

Sometimes when she sat facing his room (without seeming to see him) he was much disturbed by her one eye blinking slowly, so that her face seemed alternately dead and alive. Slowly her eyelid rose and fell while the rest of her face remained like a mask. During these moments she seemed to be listening intently.

In a place less strange to him, in a mood more normal, he would have had little difficulty in reading her heart aright. Her patient labor and her vigilance were proof of her devotion. He might have guessed that she was jealously watchful of the well-being of her distinguished guest. He might have surmised that she was unique in her misfortunes among all the women of her tribe; that her mind had been a little darkened by the shocking catastrophes of her life; that she feared that by some fatality nothing but evil could come to those who dwelt beneath her roof. He had had the key to this. "Call me not mother," she had said in bitterness of spirit.

These things he might have guessed, though there was one terrible secret which old Fanakan guarded which he could never have guessed.

However, he failed to read even those pages which would have been plain to him under other circumstances. He experienced moments of silent rage against the old woman who conjured up mysterious fears all about him and who made him fearful too.

He saw no one save old Fanakan for three days and nights, because he carefully avoided all others. It was his belief that the men of the tribe were conspiring to trouble him—that they would slyly question him when they met again. They would wish to know how he fared, and they would observe him cunningly to note if he were ill at ease.

He spent his days on the high hill where the graves were, yielding to his sense of outrage against mankind. Against his better judgment he tried to believe that anger and resentment would beget strength. He would not yield to evils which were perhaps wholly imaginary. For hours he sat alone up against the sky, among the graves, gazing at the wide seas in search of a sail, a funnel, a mast, a trailing smudge of smoke.

On the third day he witnessed a puzzling spectacle. A native sail-boat, appearing from around a distant point of land, made for the open sea. The immense sail was of a solid brilliant crimson. He watched its winged, perfect flight until something else caught his attention. The boat of the crimson sail was being pursued. The young men of the tribe, assembling on a nearby beach, had put to sea excitedly. But the crimson sail easily outdistanced its pursuers. It vanished beyond a far-off point of land, and the pursuers turned back. That crimson sail was fixed in his mind, so that he recalled it on a later day when he saw it again.

Now, however, the flight and the pursuit meant nothing to him save that it suggested to him a possibility. Why should he not learn to handle a sail and—if the worst came to the worst—stock a boat with provisions and leave the island in quest of a highway where ships passed?

He arose from his place among the graves. A sudden wish to talk with Burriss—at least to be with him for a time—had come to him.

He found Burriss in his hut noisily grinding coffee. The old man looked up, startled, as if he had forgotten him. "Oh!—hello!" he said.

That too offended Victoriano. Here was a man

who was not in any sense human, he thought. Burriss went on noisily grinding coffee. Presently he glanced up, his hand on the crank of the coffee-mill. "I've been thinking of you," he said.

When Victoriano did not speak he went on: "I hear you have a landlady."

Victoriano frowned. He would not ask Burriss how he knew. He supposed one of his boys had informed him.

Burriss continued: "I thought maybe you'd like to make her a present. You know they won't take money. They don't know what it is. They probably suspect it is something invented by the unfaithful. They might be right." He reached to a shelf behind him and got a plated knife and fork and spoon. "I don't need them," he explained. "I have others. They'll please her: the spoon especially, and the fork. Here." He thrust them into Victoriano's hand. It seemed that Victoriano might refuse to accept them. He set his grinder at work again with great energy.

Victoriano went away, smiling for the first time in days. Burriss was a good chap, after all.

He returned to Fanakan's hut: it was nearing noon, and she would expect him to eat. He went to where she squatted before her earthen oven. He placed the plated ware before her. "It is a gift for you," he said.

She skilfully hid her delight in the gift. She seemed to ignore it.

He spoke with emphasis: "It is not right to give or to take without giving or taking in return," he said.

She paid no attention. She turned away to serve his dinner of rice. She knew how to cook rice mag-

ically, so that the grains, dark and swollen, were almost wholly without moisture, and as nutritious and savory as meat. He regarded her steadily.

"Very well," he said firmly, "if you will not accept my gift, neither will I accept your dinner."

He turned and left the hut.

She stared after him dumfounded, like the mother of Peer Gynt. Gradually her face puckered; a tear burst from the socket from which she had lost an eye. She stared after him until after he had disappeared; then she sat down and hid her face in her hands. Later she took the plated ware into her withered hands and held the pieces dreamily. She looked at them again and set about polishing them. Again a tear trickled down her cheek. Certainly, she had accepted them from the beginning. Was she a girl, that she should cry out with delight? She was too old and sad to make a to-do over gifts. Oh, that he had not gone away angry, without his dinner! That was the real business of life for those who were old, to eat; though of course gifts were good.

He wandered far away, seeking undiscovered places in the wilderness. He came to a little clearing where there was a hut before which an old man sat mending his knife-handle. He was stoutly binding it with twine. The blade of the knife was unusually powerful and long, so that it excited Victoriano's curiosity.

"Where do the men of the tribe get their blades?" he inquired courteously.

The old man bade him be seated. He was one of those who had been present when the Datto had bespoken goodwill toward the guest. "From various places," he said, continuing to bind his knife-handle. "Many we make—the plainer ones. Some are brought from Manila. A few come from Spain. In

some instances we have them of travelers." When he spoke of travelers a little film descended over his eyes, though the lids seemed not to do so; and Victoriano concluded there might be something left unsaid touching travelers. The old man bit an end of twine in two. "There is also a forge on another island where very fine blades are made. The Sultan has knives from that forge."

Victoriano wanted to know where that island was.

"On that end of Bongao," said the old man, pointing, and paused.

"I know that end of the island," said Victoriano.

"On a clear day from that point you may see two islands out at sea. One is Borneo. Sandakan is there. The other is the island of the forge. Both are like smoke even on a clear day. On other days they are not to be seen."

Victoriano reflected a moment on that island where knives were forged; and then he took up the subject of Borneo and Sandakan. "There ought to be ships at Sandakan," he suggested.

Yes, often there were ships there, the old man said.

"Where do they come from, and where do they go?" asked Victoriano.

From many places, replied the old man: from Singapore, from the Straits Settlements, from far away in the Indian Ocean; perhaps also from Manila and Hong Kong.

Victoriano reflected a long time, while the old man went on with his binding. And at length he asked, trying to speak in a casual tone: "And one with fair skill might sail a boat from here to Sandakan?"

Yes, that happened not infrequently, he was informed.

The old man then spoke of a cause of excitement.

A strange sail had been seen that morning, and the young men had endeavored to overtake it. They had wondered who rode in that strange boat. But they had fallen short in their efforts, even the swiftest.

The old man put aside his knife then and set himself to the task of preparing his supper. Victoriano lingered, glad of the old man's company, since he spoke chiefly of pleasant things. Moreover, speech was easy between them, since the old man had a much readier use of Spanish than others Victoriano had talked to. Indeed, in his speech with others he was beginning to guess at their own language, or dialect, instead of experimenting with Spanish words. He had discovered that it was a matter of pride among the young men to employ their own speech rather than that of the Spaniards who, they believed, had always wronged them. But this old man, like old Fanakan, spoke a Spanish which he readily understood.

He accepted an invitation to share the old man's meal, which was of fish and plantains fried in coconut oil.

He asked how it was that fish could be obtained so readily, and was informed that the sea was only a short distance away. "I have nets there," said the old man, "and a boat."

It ended in his spending the night in that place, he and the old man talking of simple things, and then sleeping soundly. He thought with a pinching of his conscience of his temporary desertion of Fanakan; but then she had been ungracious to him.

In the morning he would have set off through the wilderness for Fanakan's hut; but his host dissuaded him from this. It was not good to walk in the jungle so early in the morning, he said; "and it is not

necessary," he added. "I will row you to the end of the island, where you will be much closer to Fanak-an's hut."

Accordingly, they took a path that brought them soon to the shore, and Victoriano was conveyed a number of miles along the coast, where he was at length landed at the end of a well-defined trail. The old man described his way to him then and turned about.

Victoriano had followed the trail but a short distance when he became aware of being in a vicinity which was not wholly strange to him. Indeed he could presently see Burriss's hut in the distance.

His heart was lighter than it had been for days. He had had a night of tranquillity and rest, and it had been good to talk to an old man whose mind seemed free of troubled or treasonable matters. He had acquired a half-formed plan, too. He thought of Sandakan, and how he might reach that place by learning to sail a boat.

He was about to pass Burriss's hut. He paused, and suddenly his heart went heavy with a nameless dread. Burriss's door was open; and even at a distance the interior of the hut presented a disturbed aspect. He hurried toward the door and looked into the hut.

It was empty. Its occupant was gone. Gone, too, all his possessions.

Victoriano smote his head with his clenched hand. "A ship!" he cried in despair, "a ship! . . ."

CHAPTER XVI

HOW VICTORIANO CLIMBS THE HILL OF GRAVES AND FINDS THAT ANOTHER HAS PRECEDED HIM

HE had not realized how much the presence of Burriss on the island had meant to him. He had felt, perhaps unconsciously, that rescue was only a matter of time. His thought had been that Burriss was not a lost man. He had come to the island as the result of a definite plan. Somewhere relatives or friends must have kept him in mind. With Burriss on the island, the island was in touch with civilization.

Now, with Burriss gone, a cord had been severed. He was now lost indeed; and with the realization that he might have to remain an outcast for months to come—perhaps for years—his strength ebbed suddenly.

He was walking like one in a dream as he approached Fanakan's hut. His eyes stared at nothing within his present horizon. He was arriving, against his will, at the conclusion that Burriss had betrayed him. He was muttering harsh words to himself. He entered his room with an abandon which caused the old woman in the adjoining room to stare before her, frowning, her head inclined to hear better. Furtively she edged her way across her room so that she could peer at him.

He caught her eye. A kind of angry energy came to him for the moment. "A ship has come and gone," he said. He seemed to be condemning her.

Beyond seeming to stop suddenly, like a machine that is run down, she paid no heed at first. Then she plucked at her camisa and looked down. Her gaze might have been interpreted either as one of guilt or amazement. Never before had he spoken to her in this manner. She had meant to show him how she had polished the gift he had brought her. She forgot that now. She said: "I saw no ship."

"Nor heard of one?" he demanded.

"Nor heard of one."

"When a ship comes in, doesn't word get about?" he asked.

She replied a little sullenly, "Who would think of me?"

He was remorseful. He had no right to be angry with her—she who had never offended him, save perhaps by being too vigilant on his behalf. "Well, never mind," he said heavily.

Her emotions stirred. "You did ill to go away without your dinner," she declared, her face puckering a little. "It is known to all that food is the gift of Allah; and even a forsaken old woman's hands are holy when she comes bearing rice."

"I did ill," he admitted. "Forgive me."

He stood in his doorway, drooping, dejected. He thought presently of the Datto. He went to call on the Datto, but the Datto knew nothing of a ship. He seemed incredulous. How did Victoriano know—or why did he believe—that a ship had come?

"Burriss is gone," said Victoriano.

Then of course, the Datto conceded, there must have been a ship. He summoned members of the tribe. But they shook their heads incredulously. They knew nothing of a ship.

The Datto turned to Victoriano. The ship might

have come in at night, he suggested—perhaps by arrangement with the bird man.

“No, not by arrangement,” Victoriano declared. “He would have let me know.” Surely, he had concluded upon second thought, this must be true!

“Yes, doubtless he would have done that,” assented the Datto, and he fell to musing; but it was plain to Victoriano that his musing changed gradually from thoughts of a ship to his own hidden sorrow, from which he seemed never to escape very far.

Victoriano went away moodily, despairingly. A fantastic suspicion took form in his mind. Could there be a conspiracy among the tribesmen to keep him among them permanently? Certainly he could not guess why they should have desired to keep him. But then, what did he know of their motives, of their inward thoughts, touching anything?

He decided that he must begin to rely wholly upon himself. He must watch constantly. There was that hill where the graves were, from which a ship would be visible for hours before it landed, and some day a ship must come.

He returned for an examination of Burriss's hut, vaguely hopeful, perhaps, of learning something. It occurred to him that he might now occupy this hut and be no longer a burden on old Fanakan—and be free of her sinister, spying eye. Yet this was scarcely a practicable plan. He should have to depend upon some one for food. For that reason he must remain on good terms with all the natives. After all, he was their guest. If he were to cease to be that his position must become at once altogether perilous. Moreover, some mysterious and hidden sorrow of Fanakan's held him.

He searched Burriss's hut carefully. Might he not

hope to find a message of instruction, of explanation—at least of good-by? They had been two white men alone among aliens. Their isolation created a bond between them. It would have been unthinkable for one to have deserted the other without cause. Self-centered as Burriss had been, he had still been a civilized man, bound by the rules of his kind.

But there was no message to be found. There was not a trace of the former occupant of the hut—nothing even to hint that a highly specialized science had been pursued here by one who valued that science above his own comfort, his safety, his life.

Victoriano turned away; but upon emerging from the hut he started with a sensation very closely akin to terror. A tiny monkey—the same little beast he had seen on a former occasion, he believed—was staring at him from an inverted position beneath a low limb: staring and screeching accusingly. It was not the dubious, changeful creature it had been before. Its mood was unmistakably positive. It screamed twice, baring all its teeth and lifting its brows until its countenance assumed an absurdly fierce expression. It dropped to the ground and thrust its head forward and upward; and then it turned and disappeared.

Victoriano wished to laugh, but he could not. His nerves were disturbed. He had to combat an absurd fancy that this apparition in the jungle signified something sinister and impending.

He spent the remainder of the day in making inquiries on all sides of the island touching that ship which had come and gone. With the suspicion that the members of the tribe might have conspired against him he framed his inquiries cunningly, indirectly. But he met only blank surprise with every reference to a ship. No one had seen a ship. Had he asked

the Datto? The Datto would know all about such things.

He began to doubt the correctness of his own conclusion. He cast about for other solutions of the mystery. Could Burriss have engaged a sailboat—possibly from one of the other islands—to convey him to Sandakan? Might not some whim, some sudden recollection, have induced him to alter his plan to remain until the arrival of a vessel? It seemed incredible.

Well, then—had he gone insane as a result of that work which was unfit for any rational being? A solution must lie somewhere! Yet he could not accept the theory that Burriss had lost his wits. He was already touched with a sort of insanity which would save him from commoner kinds. He was a madman by nature—and nature would not blunder by requiring other sacrifices from him. Moreover, even if he had lost his mind, where was he now? And why should he have carried away all the things he had collected in his hut? What could he have done with them? No, it was absurd to suppose that the old man had not really gone away.

He searched the seashore for prints of feet, examining places which had not been touched by the moving tides. And at last, thwarted and weary, he returned to old Fanakan's hut and flung himself on his mat. He would eat no supper, though the forlorn old woman conveyed to him by her persistence, by her lingering attitude, that she had celebrated his return from a night's absence by special preparation.

He turned his back on her. "I don't want anything," he said shortly.

"But I have stewed a fowl," she said faintly.

"I don't want anything," he repeated.

During the early hours of the night he arose from his mat and left the hut. A despairing sense of restlessness, of helplessness, was upon him. He thought to walk until this was gone. Besides, a shadowy hope had come to him. If Burriss had really embarked on a ship it must have been that the vessel had some mission to a neighboring island. It would return by way of Bongao, perhaps within the day. He simply could not believe that Burriss had abandoned him.

He made his way through the jungle, vocal now with timid or angry voices in hidden places. He came out to the point of land at the end of the island.

No ship was in sight far or near.

He turned to retrace his steps to old Fanakan's. As he passed Burriss's abandoned hut he paused to consider it again. Suddenly he frowned. He had left the door open that afternoon. He was certain of this. Now it was closed.

He was beginning, at this period of his island life, to question his own senses—to fear that he was becoming the victim of mad delusions. Now he asked himself: "Are you sure you looked into his hut and found him gone?"

He was sure, of course; yet he approached that closed door. He was breathing unevenly. Afraid? He would have denied it. Afraid of what?

He stealthily opened the door of the hut. The mounted birds were not there. Nothing was there. Nothing—yet he was sure he heard a hissing sound.

Impetuously he flung the door open wide and rushed into the hut. He was resolved not to begin to yield to fear, even though fear wore a face, here in this forsaken place, which was wholly strange. He dashed into the dark room, plunging into obscure places. There was nothing. He went beyond, into

the second room. The back door stood open, and he experienced a maddening sense of catching a glimpse—so fleeting that it could not be fully credited—of a form slipping out of sight. He hurried forward, looking sharply from the back door. He was now facing the jungle, the lower growth of which extended to the very sill beneath his feet. He could see nothing save a vast chaos of blackness. He listened intently, but he could hear nothing. He stood for a time, silent and tense, awaiting developments—he knew not what. But nothing happened.

He returned to Fanakan's hut and lay miserably between waking and sleeping until dawn broke. Then, almost without conscious intention, he started toward the hill where the graves were. He must pursue one simple purpose now, to wait and watch for a ship.

He encountered an old man on the path to the spring. The old man, too reticent to ask him where he went, nevertheless expressed the question with his aged eyes, over both of which bluish cataracts were slowly spreading.

"I am going to the hill where the dead are," said Victoriano. "I must watch for a ship." He meant that his words should convey a special significance. If there was in fact a conspiracy against him, the tribe should know that he was on guard.

The old man's eyes seemed to ask other questions. His attitude suggested wonder.

"Perhaps it isn't allowed to sit among the graves?" he asked.

Yes, it was allowed, the old man replied.

"There are many graves there," said Victoriano, seeing that the old man would have detained him longer.

"Yes, all our dead are there."

"They would not rest well if they were elsewhere?" asked Victoriano.

"Doubtless they would rest in peace anywhere. But the place on the hill has been consecrated to them, and it would be very bad for any one who buried a body in ground which had not been consecrated, since in that case evil spirits would come to haunt him who did so."

Victoriano went on his way. Presently he glanced back. The old man had not moved, but stood regarding him somberly.

He was not thinking of the dead when he reached the summit of the hill. He found a seat on what might have been a rude altar of stones, and for a time he gazed far away, his thoughts holding a haunting conviction of permanent isolation and loss. The world below him was like a map which has faded about the edges. He could count islands lying in a string, of which Bongao was the beginning. There were five of them. They were rugged and obscure in places. Beyond the last of them there was the open sea, empty as if the day of creation had been but yesterday.

In another direction he could trace the coast of Borneo, and not far from this another island: he guessed this to be the island on which the skilful maker of knives had his forge. But these remote places did not spell possible escape for him now. He was in a despondent mood; and presently he had removed his gaze from the trackless, desolate void, and was gazing moodily at the earth at his feet.

He did not know how long he sat thus, inert and almost without thinking. But at length his brows began to lower, his eyes to open wider. He had been aroused somewhat as a sleeper's body is aroused by

a timid touch. His brain did not respond wholly at first. The appeal to it had been indefinite, mysterious. That appeal had been, in fact, in the form of a bit of disturbed earth.

Abruptly he arose from the rude altar of stones, his body tingling with excitement. He was standing before a newmade grave.

There might have been, unknown to him, a recent death among the tribe; but this reasonable reflection was driven out by a dark suspicion which mastered him wholly. Without knowing what he did he was on his knees, removing the freshly-disturbed earth with his hands.

There was no time to go away for an implement with which to do this. That is to say, the sinister thought which had overpowered him would admit of no delay. He dug hastily, excitedly, the horror of the task lost in the greater horror of his fear. He remembered only to place the removed soil where it could be pushed back again into the cavity he was making.

He continued to dig with the energy of a kind of madness. He checked himself now and again to look about him, to guard against surprise. Then the resistless movement of his hands was resumed.

He was not conscious of surprise when he came upon a cold object of familiar outlines, as his fingers plunged beneath the surface of the loose soil. He seized upon that object and drew it forth.

It was a white man's hand: a hand at once withered and old, yet retaining the habit of a delicate fitness and skill, a hand trained for delicate work.

Victoriano took that hand into his grasp and drew steadily upward.

The face of Burriss emerged from the soil, which fell away from its delicate slopes and depressions.

He had been slain. There were knife-wounds in his skull and throat. His nostrils were slightly drawn by the contracting hand of death; his eyes showed slits of unrelieved white where the lids just failed to meet.

Victoriano drew forth the violated body and placed it on a bank of grass. He knelt before it an instant, examining the wounds. He could guess by what sort of weapon they had been inflicted. He lifted his face, on which an expression of passionate anger was stamped; and as he did so his eyes caught again the far-off blue expanse of sea with its tranquil yet haunted islands.

"There wasn't a ship after all," he said.

CHAPTER XVII

HOW VICTORIANO GRAPPLES WITH AN ENEMY AND HOW HE LOSES A FRIEND

A SHIP did arrive off the island many months later, but it did not take Victoriano away. The reason for this was that he lay in Fanakan's hut close to death, delirious, consumed by fever. The Captain of the ship, a Dane, was prevailed upon to enter the jungle to look upon a white man who was lost and very ill. He came and stood above Victoriano's simple bed, touching him with his foot and then with his hand, and speaking to him sharply. He shook his head when he received no reply. He was communicating with himself rather than with Lomofo the interpreter, who stood regarding him intently.

The man was too ill to be removed, the captain said; and besides, he was cruising leisurely, following a coast-wise course, touching at every island, taking his time. He could not be burdened with a man who seemed to be dying. He would send medicines.

He did so: but unfortunately old Fanakan conceived these to be ornaments and gifts. The two bottles were marvelous, she thought. The color of one was matchless; the shape of the other perfect. The design on one of the labels impressed her profoundly. She placed the two bottles away for safe-keeping. She would give them to her guest when he was better. The ship lay off the point of the island one long, somnolent afternoon of brilliant sunlight, mysteri-

ously quiet, coldly aloof; and then the sea was empty again save for a funnel trailing smoke on a far horizon.

Victoriano continued to lie unconscious, delirious; almost spent, yet stubbornly resisting. Old Fanakan sat beside him day and night, scarcely ever sleeping soundly. She put the juice of certain fruits into the water he drank. She watched faithfully—and waited. She knew how it would terminate. If Allah willed that he should die, he would die. If not, he would fall asleep sooner or later, and sleep soundly and long; his body would become moist, and when he awoke at last he would speak to her in a voice not his own. Then she would make broth for him, and he would begin to get his strength back.

She watched by him with an endurance not less extraordinary than his own. If her eye attended him her ear was turned toward the jungle. If her eye was given over to a fearful and penetrating search of the jungle, her ear was bent toward her patient. She did not fail him, though no one of her tribe knew how terrible was the ordeal through which she passed.

Victoriano's illness had come upon him gradually, dating from the moment when he had unearthed the slain body of Burriss on the hill of graves. That discovery had had a ruinous effect upon him. He immediately decided that he could never again look into the eyes of the men of the tribe. He concluded that he had fallen among a furtive and murderous people, to whom he must never again look for candor or honor.

He had gone to the Datto with the story of Burriss's death—taking the precaution, before he left the violated body alone, to cover it with some of the earth he had removed, lest the birds of the air assem-

ble and avenge themselves for the wrongs they had suffered.

The Datto had manifested no surprise, no rage. He had not even betrayed agitation. He had summoned the tribe about him. He had requested simply that the slayer step forth. It did not appear certain that he meant to condemn the guilty man. But no one stepped forth. The tribesmen looked from one to another and then at the Datto. No one spoke.

The Datto's sadly benevolent gaze rested upon one face after another, as if the tribe were a book and each face a page. One after another he dismissed the men who had assembled. When only half a dozen remained his manner became more forceful, his words more direct. He exercised not a little ingenuity in the form of his questions. But one after another he dismissed those who had remained until the last one was gone.

He turned tranquilly to Victoriano. "He who is guilty will not be found among my people," he said.

The old man, watching his chance, stole one swift glance at Victoriano. Had the quiet, powerful stranger taken his fellow-countryman's life? Had he followed him across the seas and into the jungle to avenge some wrong? Were not the white races cursed with those impulses which render life insecure, just as other peoples were? However, when Victoriano turned again to the Datto, the old man's face was like a mask.

He turned away in silence. How could the Datto have arrived at a conclusion by methods so swift and simple? It was true that the old man had seemed sincere; yet to himself it was plain that Burriss had been the victim of studied treachery.

He buried the slain man with only such aid as he

was compelled to accept. He carried him down the mountain and made a place for his body close to the coast, where it might be located readily if relatives came to seek him. He marked the grave, carving into a slab of mahogany the letters—

BURRISS.

Then he had returned to Fanakan's hut, fearing and mistrusting the old woman anew because of the sins of her tribe and because of her manner of slinking back into a shadow and staring at him with her piercing black eye, which glowed and faded as the eyelid rose and fell.

The illness which had been upon him when the Danish captain appeared ended in accordance with Fanakan's hopeful prediction. He slept at last and perspired freely, and when he awoke he asked in a voice not his own, "How's everything?"

She trembled a little; her face puckered, yet she smiled. Weariness fell from her.

He noted her smile. The red stain of betel-nut on her pointed teeth was not admirable, but his heart swelled. He mused vaguely, trying to take hold again: She is a woman. She is good.

She busied herself and soon a smell of stewing fowl filled the hut. That suggested many things to him. He closed his eyes, the better to behold pleasant images. He had a sensation of drifting in air. He did not know whether he should come or go. She came with broth for him, helping him to sit up. He felt his shoulder against her breast. Her hand was brown and lean, but it seemed lovely, serving him. Her arm was like an anchor, securing him. He ate the broth which she lifted to his lips.

She tended him with unremitting and jealous care. She was a wise old woman and she gave him only that which was fit for him.

One day she brought the bottles which the Dane had left. She set them down with two hands and arose, flinging her hands apart gaily; her first act of womanly coquetry. She explained how they had been brought as a gift.

He looked at one of the labels and smiled wanly. She hung upon that smile. She was a proud woman.

She did not impose her presence upon him needlessly. She left him alone much of the time—or seemed to. Much sleeping would be good for him now.

Nevertheless by day and night he still had a sense of being watched—of being watched and protected. Many times he knew, without looking about, that she sat just inside her room with her eye on him. He could always verify this impression. He came to realize more clearly that she was dividing her faculties, that she was watching the jungle too, and listening. She always sat where she could look into his room and also out of her own door.

She began to admit visitors. Tangka came with other young men. They seemed really solicitous. The Datto came. He looked about in Fanakan's hut in a manner which suggested suspicion; and when he brought his somber gaze to rest upon Victoriano he nodded with satisfaction. They all seemed sincere enough in their pleasure at finding him recovering.

He could feel new health stirring in his hands, in his chest, in his feet, when one day Fanakan went away on an errand. She went reluctantly, but she needed materials for her mats. It was plain that she meant to be in a great hurry.

Victoriano watched her go, and he smiled faintly. She seemed to him quaint now rather than grotesque. He realized how she had stuck to him. She had saved him. He watched while she thrust a great tattered palm out of her way. The palm fell back into place, swaying back and forth, and he could see her no more.

He thought she would be back soon; yet it seemed to him after a while that a good deal of time had passed, and he could not see her, though he went to his door repeatedly and looked all about. He realized now that he had come to depend upon her for much else than food and shelter. Her presence, gaunt and often silent though it was, had come to be infinitely better than solitude.

Presently the silence began to oppress him as if it were a different silence from the day before or any other day. There was something of a suspended quality in it—as if a climax were developing, as if some sort of deep ferment were going on.

He chided himself for fancifulness. Persons who had been very ill always had to get hold of themselves again, he reflected. He went into his own room and tried to go to sleep.

However, the images which passed through his mind were images of action rather than of repose. They stimulated him instead of summoning dreams. He lay wide awake.

Of a sudden he sat up, his senses strained, his pulses bounding.

He could not have said that he had heard a footfall. Indeed, very certainly he could not have done so. Bare feet on soft earth make no noise. Nor had he heard a voice. Nevertheless, his senses informed him—warned him, rather—that he was no longer alone

as he had been a moment earlier. Most disquieting of all, he felt that he knew very well that it was not Fanakan who was returning, but that instead the invisible presence which had begun its noiseless intrusion was that of an enemy, of one who moved stealthily, whose mind was filled with cunning and treachery.

Again he chided himself. He had been thinking absurd thoughts. The senses must either give warning, or they must fail to do so. There was no middle ground.

Yet he could not be sure of this. In the quiet of the jungle might not a moving body set in motion vibrations which the most delicate tissues of the ear would record, though there would seem no record of what ordinarily passes for sound? Might not odors from a distance be wafted in his direction? Moreover, his sense of discomfort, of apprehension, was becoming more intense, despite his self-chiding.

He arose noiselessly and went to his door. He could see a fairly wide radius of jungle, but he could not perceive that a leaf stirred anywhere.

The complex life of the jungle was going forward, he reflected. Birds and insects were all about him. He experienced relief when he thought how there might be certain sounds in that jungle life which were so unfamiliar, so wholly unknown, that he might fail to hear them in the complete sense of that word.

He returned to his place of rest and closed his eyes. He would try to shut out all the strange images which perplexed him, which refused to let him rest.

There was a moment of profound silence—and then there was pandemonium let loose. There was the awful scream of a woman close by, and a rush of bare feet. The house shook.

He sprang to his feet instantly, all his muscles tense.

With incredible quickness the drama developed and passed.

A man—a stranger—stood before him with both arms elevated above his right shoulder, in the attitude of a woodman wielding an ax. He gripped in his hands a weapon like a crude sword. He was on the point of bringing it down with all his force.

Victoriano caught the glance of this man, who was a native. And he thought of Burriss's word *zealot*, and of what he had said of the natives who ran amuck.

There was not the fraction of a second to lose. Victoriano was a good two steps from the terrible figure before him, which was advancing with a rush. Should he spring back toward the door and a possible avenue of escape? There was not time enough. Rather, he must leap forward and grapple with the madman. He must seize his hands, his whole body, and overpower him.

These thoughts were not really formulated. They consisted simply of instinct. Instinct decided that he must leap forward and crowd his assailant so that the descending blow would lose at least a part of its force. And then there was that scream, so closely following the rush of the armed native as to be almost coincidental with it.

Victoriano had no time to glance aside. His brain recorded the fact that it was Fanakan who had screamed. Then her gaunt figure filled his vision. She had dropped the parcel for which she had gone away. She was before him. She was facing the armed zealot. And suddenly she collapsed with a bitter cry ending in a moan. The weapon had descended and had bitten deeply into her breast. As if in a dream Victoriano heard her utter her last words: "I would have saved him, and I could not."

He was not consciously listening. He was acting. For an instant the maniac was off his guard; and in that instant Victoriano had grappled with him. He realized that he was at grips with a demon—a man with a demon's strength and a demon's elusiveness.

He would not release his hold on the limbs which were like steel, on the human mechanism which was like a strongly-driven machine. He had heard the weapon of his antagonist clatter to the floor, and he exerted every ounce of strength he possessed. A moment before he would have confessed his physical weakness; now, for at least a moment, he was given the strength of desperation, a strength seeming to spring from the will rather than the body. He clung to the supple, half-naked body which sought to elude him. The two figures swayed from one side of the room to the other, from one room to the other.

Fanakan lay on her back, motionless. Victoriano, amid a chaos of passing impressions, retained the one impression caught by a chance glance. She was dead. Once his feet stumbled over her body and he had tried to avoid this again. He had been nearly lost then. He had leaped beyond the barrier of the dead body and was upon his assailant again. His breath was coming with short, hissing sounds; his head was bursting. And yet he could detect no sign that his adversary was weakening. He sought for such signs instinctively. He was not conscious of doing this.

There was a fall. Together the two bodies struck the floor, Victoriano clinging close, striving mainly to prevent the half-naked man from escaping him.

A new element had entered into the struggle. Victoriano knew much of the art of wrestling and he realized quickly that his adversary did not. He found that confidence which he had lacked before. He began

to spare himself—his failing strength—while he worried and perplexed the other man. His superior weight began to count—that superior weight which had been almost a handicap before. Little by little he gained an ascendancy. At length he was kneeling, every breath a sob, on his adversary's body, pinioning his hands to the floor.

He remained so, waiting for his lungs to recover a little. Tremors shook his body; he could feel that he was again feverish. More than once he almost fell forward, limp and helpless, from dizziness.

While he sought to regain his strength a little his glance wandered about him, and suddenly his eyes opened wide. A wisp of stout thongs, which Fanakan had probably brought for use in her work, lay within reach of his hand.

By using one knee—together with all his superior weight—he was able to liberate one hand. He shook loose one of the thongs. He began the precarious task of binding his adversary's hands together. He feared he should never succeed in this; yet at length, after the small, hard hands had eluded him again and again, he achieved his end. The native lay quiet at last, his lips foaming, his eyes closed, his features set in an expression of stoic endurance.

Having bound the hands, Victoriano took other thongs and bound the man's feet. He did this painstakingly, thoroughly. He had now made a helpless captive of Fanakan's slayer.

He turned toward the body of Fanakan. Already it was becoming rigid. He took up the weapon which had deprived her of her life. It seemed to him a ghastly tool: his hand shrank from it. He took it out into the jungle, and finding a rock, he broke the weapon and flung its parts far and wide.

Then, most amazing of all the experiences of his hardy life, he reeled and fell. His overtaxed body had rebelled. He lay trembling, utterly spent. It seemed to him that the feel of the soft cool earth was the one thing in all the world which he could accept gratefully.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW VICTORIANO WOULD HAVE TAKEN A LIFE AND HOW HIS OWN LIFE IS SPARED

HE could not have said how long he lay on the cool earth outside Fanakan's hut. He lay listening to two voices within him. The first, to which he was accustomed, urged him to arise and perform certain simple duties. The other, strange to him, bade him lie and take his ease and care for nothing. The first reminded him that he ought to inform the tribe of Fanakan's death and of his capture of her slayer. The other, replying to this, said irritably, "Why should you be in a hurry?" He listened with amazement to that second voice, suspecting that perhaps it had a good deal to do with the other strange things which were of the sultry jungle. Neither of the voices decided the matter. Opening his eyes after a long time he perceived a huge black ant balancing on the seam of his sleeve, cogitating. Then he got to his feet.

There was a rush of blood to his brain, a bad taste in his mouth. He wanted to find a place where the ants could not reach him and lie down again, but he resisted that wish. He decided that he must go to the Datto immediately. However, he yielded first to an impulse to enter the hut and view his prisoner.

He entered the hut: and immediately dismay and bewilderment were upon him. His prisoner was gone. Bits of thongs lay on the floor, gnawed through.

He tried to regain possession of his old fighting spirit, his old sound judgment. He was in a serious predicament here. He had conquered that half-naked, sinewy fiend once. He knew well that he had not the strength to do this again. Something akin to despair darkened his mind. Oddly, he seemed for the first time to become wholly cognizant of certain facts: that his late adversary had worn long hair which got in the way as they contended; that there were numerous blemishes on his body: whitish welts on one side and ragged, triangular scars on the other. Above all, he recalled the extraordinary suppleness of the body, with its almost serpentine distribution of motive centers. He tried to escape from the lethargic sense of horror that was upon him. *What if he came back?*

His body stiffened suddenly. He had heard a swishing sound of disturbed palms near at hand. A kind of fury shook him, his eyes blazed. After all, he would not fear any man so long as he had a fighting chance.

He relaxed slowly: it was a friend, or a seeming friend, who approached. It was Tangka, coming to inquire after him.

Tangka advanced with a smile which faded quickly. He had read tidings of disaster in Victoriano's eyes. He quickened his pace, his manner suddenly curious and grave. He entered the hut when Victoriano moved aside. However, he seemed not greatly moved as he stood looking down on the body of Fanakan. He was much more moved, it seemed, when he noted now that Victoriano was staggering toward a support of some sort, and that he was trying to wipe some invisible thing from his face with a trembling movement of his hand.

Victoriano began to explain: "He wanted to kill

me—a man who came rushing in. He had a knife. She flung herself between us.”

Tangka waited for more.

“I wrestled with him. I bound him. Then I had to rest—outside. When I came back he was gone.”

Tangka nodded. This statement was true and correct, he was sure. “What sort of looking man?” he asked.

But Victoriano shook his head vaguely and his mind seemed to wander. By an effort he said—“Let the Datto know.” He wished to lie down, to rest for days and nights together. He added: “If they find one with scars on his body let them send for me.”

When Tangka went away he sat in the doorway, a statue-like figure. He was trying to be ashamed of his weakness, of his fear, but it seemed he could not care very much. He thought of water; and suddenly he knew that he did not care for anything save a drink. He was urgently in need of a drink.

He went to the spring for fresh water, carrying Fanakan’s bamboo pole.

When he arrived at the spring he noted that there was no one about—a fact which he recalled later under strange circumstances. He filled the bamboo pole and as he did so he reflected heavily: “The fever is coming back. I shall be laid up again.” It seemed to him now that he was surely doomed.

Men came and carried away the body of Fanakan. He watched them, helping ineffectually. His head was burning. He could feel an evil, wasting force entrenching itself throughout his body. But he would not speak of any need of his own, now that the dead claimed attention. The bearers went away with their burden.

During the remainder of that day, and during the

night, and the next day, no one appeared. The hut remained silent, seemingly abandoned.

Victoriano slept much. When he awoke occasionally he crept to where the bamboo pole was and washed a bitter scum from his lips. These efforts exhausted him, so that he was glad to return to his mat and sleep again. A sensation of evil rather than of pain moved in all his limbs, preparing an assault upon his brain. He felt himself to be the victim of some evil magic. He fought weakly against the conclusion that he was now surely lost.

He tried to cling to a kind of reasonableness. He had not been abandoned. The tribe would be engaged in carrying the body of Fanakan to the hill-top. They would be considering the crime of which she had been a victim. Later they would come to him.

Toward nightfall he lay on his mat, staring into the adjoining room. He marveled that a creature so beaten and silent as Fanakan could leave so utter a void. It seemed not only that the hut was deserted but that the island had become deserted. Now that she was dead she became more vivid to him than she had been alive. He could see her as she brought the medicine bottles which she had mistaken for ornaments, putting them down before him with a playful salaam.

Presently his glance was arrested. He had been absent-mindedly tracing the structure of the wall in Fanakan's room. The bamboo uprights and the grasses were all of a golden yellow, being thoroughly dried. They were perfectly clean. And it seemed that the old woman had a sort of cupboard, or compartment, upon the wall between two bamboo uprights. Pieces of split bamboo, fastened from one upright to another, formed this cupboard.

As his glance took in this hidden recess his eyes be-

gan slowly to widen. The end of a gorgeous purple feather was visible.

He frowned and closed his eyes. He opened his eyes again with resolution. Had he been dreaming? No—that tip of purple feather was undoubtedly there.

He frowned again. Again he closed his eyes, and a slab of mahogany arose before him. It bore the letters in his own carving—

BURRISS.

He arose and felt his way along the wall. It seemed now that his legs might fail him. He came to that aperture where the feather was. With a shrinking yet determined movement he put his hand into the aperture.

His eyes opened wider with slowly-dawning horror. He stood stock still. He drew forth his hand slowly, without looking. He held a birdskin in his fingers. He brought his eyes to rest upon this without ceasing to frown. The skin slipped from his fingers. He felt in that invisible aperture again. Another skin came forth. Almost automatically he continued to bring forth the brilliant skins, dropping them silently to the floor.

He moved away at last, seeking his mat. He sat down and tried to think. Here in Fanakan's hut, then, were the spoils of the murder. This was clear.

How had they come to be here? In what way was Fanakan connected with the crime? It had not been her hand which had deprived the old man of his life. He felt positive of this. But she must have known that this booty had been brought to her house. Did she, therefore, know who the criminal was? Had she, knowing all, shielded him?

It needed only another step to connect the futile attempt upon his own life with the successful attempt upon Burriss's. The same hand had been at work in both cases. But the motive?

That seemed less plain. Zealotry? Burriss's word came back to him; Burriss's word and his warning. There were zealots among the natives as among other peoples.

So—he had found a clew. He recalled a demoniac light in the eyes of that man who had attempted to destroy him—a light which burned horribly through loose black hair. He lifted his hand to his head to shut out the sight, and the touch of his forehead was like the touch of flame.

Then it seemed to him that he ceased to care about anything. Why fight against forces which were too mysterious to grasp? He relinquished the will to know, almost the will to live. A welcome languor stole over him. He slept, knowing that sleep might mean death.

He lay on his mat with closed eyes, breathing deeply. Occasionally his lips moved and incoherent words escaped them. Though he had ceased consciously to struggle some fierce form of warfare began to wage itself within him. Perhaps the Victoriano of the temperate plains was wrestling with the Victoriano of the tropic jungle. Cries of rage and despair burst from his lips. At such times his eyes opened slowly, he became momentarily still, as if his brain were trying to analyze that disturbance which had aroused him. Then his lids flickered; the light of reason faded from his eyes; he slept again.

Late in the night he awoke. His mind was clear now. He sat up and mused. He was ill again, he realized. The fever had returned. He seemed to be

perishing of thirst. He pictured the spring where the cool water flowed away abundantly into a hidden ravine. He could see the crystal clear stream, bubbling up with a little stir of the sand about it, immediately clarifying itself. He got to his feet. He must have water.

He set off for the spring, but his limbs began to tremble. He had no strength left. Once and again he paused and let himself down on his hands and knees to rest. For moments he lay in the silence and darkness, striving with himself, struggling against utter surrender, reminding himself that men had been more utterly lost than he and had yet survived. Once and again he got laboriously to his hands and knees, finally attaining an upright position, his limbs trembling as if they must soon collapse. Thus he resumed his journey.

At length he came within less than a hundred yards of the spring. He lay down for one more rest, sighing deeply and pressing his forehead against his arm. For a time it seemed that he lost consciousness. His mind awakened slowly at length, though he seemed now to enter a realm of mocking delusions. His senses were evidently bearing false witness. With utter incredulousness he lifted his face as he lay in the path. His hand supported his upper body. He smelt tobacco smoke; and while this was not very strange in itself, the incredible fact was that it was smoke from an American cigarette.

He let himself down so that his body rested prone on the ground. He pondered. An American cigarette? Impossible! He was not to be tricked. His mind was at fault again. He was thousands of miles from an American cigarette. There never had been such a thing here in the jungle and probably never

would be. He lifted his head again. Now he smelt the aroma of coffee. Not the coffee of the natives, who brewed a syrupy beverage with thick dregs, but the coffee of the American trail, the American desert, made in a container of large size, with plenty of body, with a lot of water. It was American-made coffee he smelt. And there was that American cigarette again.

Again he rested his head on his arm. It occurred to him that perhaps he had better return to the hut. Delirium was setting in, obviously, and he ought to be in his own place. He had been foolhardy to undertake a journey to the spring at night. If he were to be really ill his only hope was in remaining in Fankan's hut, where there would be an inquiry for him sooner or later. Yes, he must go back. But he did not stir. Almost better to die with the odor of American coffee and an American cigarette in his nostrils than to return to those other conditions where death would come with no soothing illusions.

He opened his eyes wide: he had heard a voice.

It seemed to him that his heart would break when he heard that voice—for it was the voice of a white man. He had not caught the words, but there was no mistaking the fact that the speaker had been a white man. The quality of the tone had been identification enough. There was candor in it, and confidence, and a genial deference.

He heard the voice again, and this time he caught the words, “. . . sleep a little longer.”

He closed his eyes. Oh, to put that delusion from him! He must not yield to delirium again. That way lay death. Then it occurred to him that the cool water he craved might abate his fever a little—long enough to enable him to return to the hut.

He arose and advanced a step, two steps. His

breath came noisily. There was a light!—right there before him. He caught hold of a depending branch for support. He was close upon the spring, and there was some one there. It was all quite real, all of the commonplace world which he had known and lost. There was a tent with the flaps tied back: a conical tent of a faded white, though it now appeared black save where the rays of the fire in the open touched it.

A man had his place before the tent. He sat on a box of American pine with black letters stenciled on the side. There was a campfire before him. Sparks from the fire crackled gaily, exploding into an infinite number of subdivisions. The man touched the embers of the fire with a stick and a mass of glittering light, half flame and half sparks, ascended and rioted in the dark.

It was very cheerful, but Victoriano knew it was wholly unreal, because of the minute realism of every detail. The man before the fire was smoking a cigarette, holding his head a little to one side to save his eyes from the smoke. He put down the stick with which he had stirred the fire and adjusted a coffee-pot a little apart, where it continued to simmer.

Presently there was a wavering of the shadows about the opening of the tent, like dark waters stirring. There was a second man—perhaps other men—in the tent.

The man at the fire straightened up and flung his cigarette away. There was a tiny jet of sparks in a black spot where it had fallen, these instantly fading. The man seemed to be talking to himself now. He had forgotten something, it seemed. He turned and disappeared inside the tent. It was as if a first act in a pantomime had ended. It was all perfectly real.

An interval; then another man emerged from the

tent and stood out in the open, straightening himself, yawning, clenching his hands and lifting his arms. He seemed at first like a silhouette, with only one aspect: that which caught the light of the fire. He turned so that his lighted profile was visible to Victoriano.

Then the stillness of the night was shattered by a savage cry. Victoriano had uttered that cry. He had recognized Ramon.

He had not cried out in the first instant of recognition. He had experienced, as he had often done of late, the obscurities of a dual nature. He was two men: one striving for truth and stability, the other yielding to wild dreams. The sober man in him had reflected sternly, upon beholding Ramon: "It is a delusion. I am going mad." But the other man would not be restrained. He had recognized Ramon, the man who had wrought his ruin, who was answerable for all his torment. And with that savage cry he dashed forward, finding once more unsuspected strength, though only a little time before he had been helplessly weak.

The sober man in Victoriano ceased to try to restrain the madman, but seemed instead to sanction that madman's plunge. He seemed to say to that madman, "Have your way. Lay hands upon the illusion which you take to be Ramon—and when you find that your hands touch only empty space, perhaps you will be cured of your madness. Go further: if you find that it is really Ramon, then destroy him, so that you may hereafter have peace."

Ramon's terrors, upon hearing that savage shout in the dead of night, were altogether rational. He turned quickly and seized in his hands a rifle which lay near him. But before he could complete this movement his arms were pinioned, he was flung off

his balance. He struggled to his feet just as two other men came rushing out of the tent, rifles at a ready.

Victoriano ignored those other men, though it seemed to him perplexing, inappropriate, that there should be other men, outsiders, in this spectral drama in which he and Ramon had a logical place. He was upon Ramon again, clasping his arms, staring into his eyes from a distance of only a few inches. He released Ramon's arms and tried for his throat. But in that instant Ramon sprang back a step.

Here was the opportunity those other men had been waiting for. Each had manipulated the bolt of his rifle so that a cartridge had been placed in the chamber. Now both moved with mechanical precision, with promptness. In another second they would have fired.

But again a cry arose. It was Ramon's voice this time, and the word he uttered, in a tone of astonishment and terror, was——

"Victoriano!"

Despite the tangled black beard and unkempt hair, the wasted form and savage fury, Ramon had recognized the man whom he would have called his friend. He turned with desperate haste to the men who had thrown their rifles into position. "No!" he cried, fairly screaming the word—"No!" And he turned again to Victoriano.

But Victoriano, realizing that Ramon's word had saved his life, suddenly drew away as from a precipice encountered in headlong flight. He stood staring at Ramon while one might have counted ten. He stared at Ramon—not the wily enemy of his evil dreams, but at the light-hearted youth of his own land and place. Yet little by little he drew further away. In that instant reason reigned, yet he felt the fever in his brain, he heard the urgent voice of the madman within him.

It seemed to him that if he stood there another instant that madman's voice would prevail. Already his fingers were twitching to be at Ramon's throat.

Once and again he smote his breast with both fists. He was baffled, beaten. Before a restraining word could be spoken, a hand lifted, he turned and fled. The sound of his feet could be heard after he was no longer visible. The sound grew fainter. He was swallowed up in the jungle.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW RAMON COMES TO VISIT VICTORIANO IN A STRANGE PLACE AND HOW HE GOES AWAY REPULSED

DATTO BAGYAN came to Fanakan's hut in the morning, but of this Victoriano knew nothing. He lay unconscious, raging incoherently. Datto Bagyan came to bring amazing news and to confer with him. The Datto was troubled because of unprecedented events which had come to pass. He had hoped to obtain sound counsel and enlightenment from Victoriano. But he turned away hastily when he perceived how matters were, trying to think what to do.

Later there were voices in the jungle: white men's voices. They could be heard in tones which were lifted but which nevertheless retained a quality of cautiousness. They ebbed and flowed, growing nearer, passing into the distance. Once Victoriano sat up and opened his eyes wide. He had heard Ramon's voice. But he lay down and closed his eyes again with a sigh. He fell asleep.

The voices in the jungle drew near again. Finally there was a wary yet eager shout. One of the white men had discovered the hut. The man who had made this discovery called his companions. The voices were now no longer heard, but a group of men approached the hut.

One of them entered at the door and looked about him. This was Ramon. He took a step forward

and searched the second room. He turned and motioned to his companions. Then with constrained eagerness he moved forward and knelt down. He touched Victoriano on the arm.

"Victoriano!" he whispered in a voice which trembled. He uttered the name again, insistently, more loudly: "Victoriano!"

But there was no response.

With noiseless tread he withdrew, followed by his companions. Outside he gave whispered instructions. His companions went away, while Ramon reentered the hut.

The tragic figure on the mat moaned and stirred and suddenly sat erect, staring with eyes bereft of reason. One word was uttered in a voice which had worn itself to hoarseness: "Ramon!"

"Do you know me, Victoriano?" asked Ramon, reaching for his friend's hand.

But Victoriano only muttered incoherently and sank back to the mat again.

The other men presently returned, bringing yet others with them and carrying among them a stretcher. There was a young physician with them—an American. The physician bent over the man on the mat. He frowned as he made a brief examination. Then he arose and made a sign to the men with the stretcher. He watched alertly while the invalid was lifted to the stretcher. The stretcher-bearers moved away with their burden.

It came to pass that no member of that party was ever to see Fanakan's hut again. That night certain natives came and gazed at the hut; and because of the evil events which had formed its history they took counsel one with another and presently one of them stepped forward and applied a light to the dry thatch.

With incredible rapidity the hut burned. The explosion of the bamboo joints as they were consumed filled the jungle like the sound of a ragged volley-fire; and then there was silence.

When Victoriano returned to consciousness he found himself in a place which was wholly strange to him. He was lying in a fresh and comfortable bed. Perfect cleanliness marked his surroundings. He was in a tent the flap of which had been drawn back. There was a small table near him, and a camp-stool. There were medicines on the table. The sun was shining outside the tent, filling the space about him with a dusky, golden light. It was very still and tranquil.

He tried to rise, but much to his amazement he could not do so. It seemed to him that his body had been changed to lead. He could scarcely lift a hand. He tried to call and in this he was less unsuccessful.

"Hey!" he called feebly.

A man quickly yet quietly entered the tent and approached him. "Hello!" cried the man eagerly, yet almost beneath his breath. "You're all right now!"

"I'm all wrong," said Victoriano. He wished to be angry, because this man had said he was all right. But he could not be angry. That leaden sensation in his limbs was in his brain too. He could only achieve a feeble peevishness, and this he was ashamed of. He was thinking that it was not he who had said "I'm all wrong." It was some other man—a man whose voice got no deeper than his throat and carried nowhere.

The man who had entered the tent did not contradict him. He only said, "You must be quiet, you know. You've had a pretty bad time." He filled a spoon from a bottle with a hand which was perfectly steady. He lifted Victoriano's head. "Swallow!"

he said. Then he lowered the sick man's head to the pillow and went away.

Presently he returned with another man: a physician. The physician began by repeating the other man's performance almost without variation. "Hello! You're all right now," he said.

Victoriano refused to deny it this time. He didn't wish to hear himself speaking with another man's voice—tremulously, almost like a girl.

The doctor and the other man spoke to each other in low tones. They seemed to be pleased in their cool way. Their eyes were beaming. They looked at Victoriano again. The doctor said: "You must just lie quiet. You're coming around all right now." Then they left him.

He closed his eyes, but only for an instant. It was too good to see the dusky golden light filling the tent and to note the cleanliness and freshness of his bed. He sighed. It was good to lie here and realize that he had come within the reach of white men and the things white men stood for. Blissfully he drifted away to sleep again.

Long, pleasant days passed. He began to experience an ever-present hunger. They brought him delicious things to eat, but only enough for a mouse. One day he asked for more. "That is," he added apologetically, "if there's enough to go round."

The man he addressed laughed somewhat ambiguously. "There's plenty more," he said. But he made no move to bring more.

Victoriano regarded him inquiringly. He thought to ask: "Where am I?"

"On the island of Bongao," was the reply.

Victoriano gazed thoughtfully at the foot of his bed. He was trying to separate the stuff which must

have been dreams from the stuff which was evidently real. He thought of another question. "Who are you?" he asked.

The man laughed again. "Haven't you wondered before?" he asked.

Victoriano confessed that he had not.

"I'm one of the hospital corps men—Price." Then he seemed to think of something he had forgot. He went away whistling a very thin yet musical whistle.

The Datto came to see him in course of time. The Datto came in state, with warriors marching two abreast and remaining outside the tent. The Datto had been eager to talk with Victoriano on a former occasion, but he had been unable to do so because Victoriano had lain at the point of death. He had wished to inform him of the arrival of many of his race at the point of the island. He had wished to inquire if this meant a very comprehensive search for birds, or if perhaps an entire tribe of men had lost their way, as Victoriano had done. He had been required to get at the root of these matters without Victoriano's aid. He had done so almost wholly to his satisfaction. There had been one man among the strangers who was different from the others, who spoke in a low voice, but who made all his words count just the same. This man was evidently himself a sort of Datto—a Datto wearing a strap of white on his shoulder, with a border of gold and two gold bars across it at either end. This man had explained in a tranquil manner that the Datto Bagyan and his people might look upon the strangers as friends. There had been formal parleying, and gifts offered and accepted on either side, and the Datto Bagyan had been convinced that on the whole he was a greater man even than he

had supposed, since men from far across the sea had come over to get better acquainted with him.

Now that the Datto was permitted at last to see Victoriano he had only one important question to ask. There was a physician with the strangers, he reminded Victoriano; and he asked, Was he a better physician than any other in the world? Could he do what others could not do?

Victoriano thought this improbable. Still, he said, the physician who had come from across the sea was certainly a very good physician. But the Datto Bagyan scarcely heard the closing words. His mind had wandered, his eyes had become somber. Presently he informed Victoriano that the mystery of old Fanakan's death yet remained unsolved. A most thorough search had been made, but the slayer had escaped. He had been, the Datto said, a man of some distant tribe. He must have made his escape in a sailboat, by night. No one could guess why he should have wished ill to Fanakan.

"It was I he would have slain," said Victoriano.

The Datto coughed uncomfortably. He did not wish to be drawn into a discussion of those zealots who occasionally ran amuck and derived a mad delight from slaying unbelievers. The Datto went away presently, leaving behind him an impression of disappointment.

During the hours Victoriano spent in silence or alone he heard certain sounds which seemed incredibly strange in this lost world. There were trumpet calls early and late and at intervals during the day. They were so clear and vigorous that he always wished they might last longer. They dispelled the spectral quality of the island. He also heard many men's voices, often lifted in pleasant banter. And when the nights set in—that was the most wonderful time of

all. He could hear music. There was singing, and the sound of guitars and violins. One night his heart almost stopped beating when he heard broken fragments of a song, together with pensive harmonies and the bitter-sweet singing of a violin. There were the words——

*As long as the heart has passions,
As long as life has woes . . .*

He began to breathe deeply, rapidly; tears came to his eyes. He had heard Fidesia sing that song many a time. He could see her singing it now, her bosom filling, her eyelids seemingly weighted down, her face rapt with the sweet sadness of it.

One day Ramon stood in the doorway of the tent and looked at him with eager eyes.

He withdrew his own eyes from Ramon's immediately. He lay staring upward. His fingers closed into fists, a wave of rebelliousness swept over him.

Ramon came forward slowly. "Victoriano!" he exclaimed.

Victoriano did not reply.

Ramon drew forth a camp chair and stationed himself by the bed. His color came and went. "Victoriano," he repeated, "tell me: how did you come here?"

Victoriano's voice was not yet quite his own, yet he managed to put a good deal of power into it as he replied, without shifting his glance, "How did you come here?"

Ramon leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped uneasily. "But you were in distress when we found you," he said. "You weren't at all yourself. I scarcely knew you."

Victoriano realized that various long-neglected offices had been performed for him. His hair had been cut, his beard shaved off. He fell to thinking of this. He ran his hand over his head and down his jaw to the point of his chin. Then the thought came to him that his whole life, his very self, had been made the subject of an outrageous jest, an unspeakably horrible and disorderly form of helplessness. And all this was to be traced to the fact that Ramon had intruded in his affairs back there by that beloved river where his days had been pleasant and serene.

He turned suddenly, his brow dark, his voice raised violently: "And you ask me how I came here?" he demanded.

The man who had tended Victoriano for many days heard this thundered question from his post outside the tent. He entered hurriedly. He glanced at Ramon, who arose regretfully and went away.

Yet there were many questions which Victoriano might have asked Ramon. There were certain things he wished greatly to know. How long a time had elapsed since he had gone away from the Rio Grande valley? What had happened since he left home? Were his parents well? And Fidesia—had she come home? That last question was the one to which he most urgently desired an answer. But he could not ask Ramon for news of Fidesia. He could not comprehend why this was so, but he knew that he would rather have remained in ignorance to the end than to have sought relief from Ramon.

One day another cot was set up near his own and another man came to share the tent with him: another man who was ill. But this other man began to recover immediately, so that in two or three days he wished to be up and gone.

One day the two men lay in the tent in a silence so pronounced that a single fly, circling madly about in eccentric spirals, set up a great din. The man suddenly turned over on his side and propped his head up on his hand. He looked at Victoriano a long time: casually, as if perhaps he were thinking of something else. He was appraising Victoriano; and at length he said, "My name is Busbee."

Victoriano smiled. That was a manner he liked: no words wasted; a direct and candid hint. "Mine is Shreve," he replied. "They call me Victoriano."

They lay examining each other not too curiously for a time; then Victoriano asked, "Who are you: I mean, all of you? Why are you all here?"

"We're Co. H of the 23d Infantry."

Victoriano nodded. Soldiers? He put the question to himself silently. Soldiers. He replied to himself, also in silence. "What's the occasion?" he asked aloud.

Busbee seemed perplexed. His mind faltered before it entered upon a clear right of way. Then he said with complete fluency: "You know the United States is at war, don't you?"

"Who with?" asked Victoriano.

"With Spain!" The words were uttered in amazement.

Victoriano mused. "And did you suppose you'd find any Spaniards here?" he asked.

This seemed disconcerting. "No—very likely not. But you know Spain owns this island." He added immediately—"Did own it. It's Uncle Sam's now."

This did not impress Victoriano, seemingly. "What month is this?" he asked.

Busbee was dumfounded. "December," he said.

Victoriano thoughtfully rubbed his jaw. "Fine

month," he said. "Christmas comes in December—at home." He reflected and then asked, "What year?"

Busbee sat up violently. "Good God!" he exclaimed. And then: "You'd better go to sleep again."

CHAPTER XX

HOW VICTORIANO GAINS STRENGTH AGAINST THE DAY OF HIS GREATEST NEED

THERE came a day when he sat up in bed and had food brought to him in more generous portions. He ate in peace. It seemed to him that the dusky yellow light of the tent was much to be admired. He even looked with favor upon the solitary coconut palm which was visible through the opening of the tent, with its fruit bunched at the top of the trunk, where the foliage began.

There came a day, later, when he got up and dressed and sat in a chair and explored his pockets and examined his hands and feet a little wonderingly. The day after that he was permitted to emerge from the hospital tent and walk about a little.

He was astounded. He stood in the midst of a colony of decent nipa huts, all new. They were in two long straight lines. Apart from them a stout wooden house, built on the American plan, stood overlooking the ocean. Many men of his own race were about him, all wearing khaki uniform. He asked about the uniform and learned that new word.

A man came out of one of the huts and greeted him in a casual yet friendly way. Thereupon other men emerged from other huts and surrounded him. They were all young men, or nearly all. They asked questions in a casual manner, yet with an air of wishing to ask other questions in a manner not at all casual.

Presently two of these men looked at each other, clearly telegraphing certain intelligence between them; and then one of them said to Victoriano: "How would you like to be sitting in Pop Kleinsmith's right now?"

Victoriano finished what he was saying to one of the other men; then he brought his glance to bear on the man who had put this last question. A puzzled expression came into his eyes. "Pop Kleinsmith's?" he repeated.

"On the Barbary Coast," put in the other man.

Victoriano dropped his eyes, puzzled.

"'Frisco," added the first, smiling.

Victoriano gazed at the two men steadfastly. At length he said: "I saw you two fellows in a place in San Francisco."

The two turned to their comrades. "In Pop Kleinsmith's," they explained.

This development was highly satisfactory to every one. Victoriano instantly became one with these men because he had been in Pop Kleinsmith's. He was taken into one hut and another and shown the arrangement of things. He saw neat little beds and rifles and sidearms, and also books and newspapers and trifles from home. One man offered him a pipe and another tobacco and a third books. Their manner in every case was subdued, because he was yet, at least technically, an invalid—a man on the sick list.

He went back to the hospital tent with his mind quickened, his heart warmed. He felt excited and fatigued. He slept a long time.

The next day when the physician came to the tent he pronounced the patient a well man. He gave him brusque words of counsel and went away.

Emerging from the hospital tent, where he no longer had a right to remain, he encountered a tranquil,

gigantic man—the company First Sergeant—who looked him up and down and said: “You had better go and have a talk with the Captain.” He pointed down the company street toward that house which stood apart, and which Victoriano had previously observed.

He went to that house and climbed the three steps to a veranda where there were easy chairs. When he stood on the topmost step a man emerged from the door before him and stood looking at him with calm curiosity.

Victoriano felt strangely uplifted the moment he met the gaze of this man, who was Captain Standish. He knew, by processes too subtle to be analyzed, that he stood in the presence of a man of rare excellence, of special training. He quickly appraised this man in terms of his own experience. The Captain was the sort of man who would have owned lands and herds if he had been a citizen of the far Southwest: he wouldn't have been riding a cow-pony or mending fences or rounding up cattle.

On the other hand, Captain Standish looked at Victoriano with a quietude which hid his amazed interest in this man. The Captain was a distinctively military appearing man, with an air of almost abnormal repression. He was one who formed his opinions and judgments deliberately. He was a low-voiced, ruddy man with very blue eyes. There was an enigmatic quality in those blue eyes, which might have seemed childlike, because of their intensity and freshness, but which were nevertheless not at all childlike. They penetrated deeply without the aid of any of the conventional gestures of penetration. He was a man with an uncommon knowledge of the art of being

gentle in a profound sense without being amiable out of season.

It was the Captain's belief that he ought to know certain things about Victoriano, whose presence on the island was a mystery. He began asking questions, in a reassuring tone. One of the first questions was: "How did you happen to be here?"

Victoriano replied with candor: "I was on a ship, laid up with a broken leg. I didn't like it where I was. I decided to quit."

The Captain weighed this. The last statement seemed wholly inadequate. He lived in a world in which the verb *to quit* was scarcely admitted to regular fellowship with other verbs. He repeated the words: "You quit?"

"I jumped overboard and swam ashore," said Victoriano.

The Captain did not seek to ignore or belittle the amazing significance of this. "What did you expect to find?" he asked.

"Oh, maybe horses and cattle—and men."

"And of course you found no horses or cattle?"

"Not one."

"And—men?"

Victoriano reflected. "A sort of children," he said at length.

Back in the room from which Captain Standish had emerged there was a little volume of poems containing one which had in it the line *half devil and half child*. His eyes beamed. "How did you get along?" he asked, easily betraying a mild perplexity.

Victoriano replied that he had not done badly until he fell ill; and then he related the story of Burriss.

The Captain looked entirely serious and made a note of this, no doubt intending to make it a matter

of official report. He asked a number of questions touching Burriss. It did not appear that he was greatly surprised to learn that Burriss had been slain. He had given a good deal of time to the study of that form of fanaticism which he might expect to find among the people of the island. He was pretty sure that he had come to a place where alertness and the exercise of all the primary rules of diplomacy would pay high dividends in the form of peace and security.

He asked if Victoriano would like to become a member of his company, to which Victoriano replied candidly that he would not.

Then, the Captain said, he might apply to the First Sergeant for a place to sleep, and he was to consider himself attached to the company until he could leave the island. A vessel would be arriving soon, the Captain was positive, with mail or supplies or recruits or the paymaster.

As for the men of the company, they immediately admitted Victoriano to almost complete brotherhood with them. They did not veil their surprise when he related his story. They asked a thousand questions, some of which were of a delicately personal kind. They were specially interested in those chapters of his narrative which had to do with Fanakan. They wished to know what Fanakan looked like. However, their candidly cynical amusement quickly faded because of something in Victoriano's manner when he spoke of the old woman. She was a good woman, he said, and she had opened her door to him.

A place was assigned to him in one of the nipa huts and he quickly learned to conform to those rules which governed his companions.

There remained the matter of his attitude toward Ramon.

He persistently and perhaps stubbornly avoided Ramon. He never spoke his name, and when the name was spoken by others he walked away. It was his belief that he was through with Ramon. He did not know that he was in any manner indebted to him. The hatred he had entertained in his mind and heart during his illness and weakness passed away with his return to health and strength. Rather, he now held him in contempt. Something of delicacy and refinement in Ramon made him seem out of place among the other men. Victoriano thought he seemed rather absurd, as if he were their little brother following along. Now that his father's wealth and position could not help him his glamour seemed gone. Victoriano's decision was that he would go back to the States when the chance came, and marry Fidesia, and forget Ramon.

Unfortunately, this attitude of Victoriano's placed Ramon in a difficult position. Ramon often found himself lapsing into a brown study when the name of Victoriano was mentioned. He, Ramon, had gone about speaking in the highest terms of Victoriano. He had led in the search for him, and had found him. He had stood sponsor for his high character, had joyously claimed to be his friend. He had even sought leave to speak to the Captain while Victoriano was in the hospital tent, and had tactfully described Victoriano's status at home, and dwelt upon his worth: all this with the hope of winning more steadfast attention to Victoriano's need. If Captain Standish did not seem to be deeply impressed by this, he nevertheless accepted it in his reserved way and was to some extent guided by it. For he had a genuine liking for Ramon. He knew that Ramon was the son of excellent parents. He knew this, not because he knew

the parents or had ever seen them, but because he knew Ramon.

Ramon also embraced every opportunity to speak highly of Victoriano to the other men. He had yielded to the temptation to make him out a genuine personage in his home valleys. He had been wholly sincere in declaring that a better man than Victoriano was not to be found anywhere: better in honor, better in courage, better in simple and rugged sense.

Thus it was that when Victoriano, after his recovery, studiously avoided him, he drew apart, wounded and perplexed. He sought diversion by writing letters: chiefly to the members of his family, but also to Fidesia. Happily he did not know that the letters he addressed to Fidesia in Spain did not reach her, for the reason that she had left Spain before they arrived. As for Victoriano's distant conduct, he hoped to conquer that soon. He tried to plan measures to insure this end.

It was so that matters stood when the great adventure drew near.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW FOUR MEN BEGIN A VOYAGE AND HOW FATE DECREES THAT TWO OF THEM SHALL KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER

VICTORIANO was down on the beach bailing water from Tangka's boat, which he had borrowed. The coconut shell in his hand passed back and forth steadily and the boat was nearly emptied.

Three men had planned an expedition to that island where fine swords were forged. Every one had heard of that place. Victoriano had been engaged to accompany the others because of his knowledge of the natives, and even of their language, and because he could borrow a boat and sail it too.

The three men of the garrison were Holland and Bliss—the men Victoriano had encountered first on the Barbary Coast—and Busbee, beside whom Victoriano had lain in the hospital tent.

They all had leave to be gone two days and nights, and they had made preparations accordingly. They had drawn rations for that period; had made their blankets and mess kits into a pack, and had filled their belts with ammunition.

Victoriano, bailing the boat, suddenly lifted his head and his hand remained in air. The others were coming, ready to set out. They were talking eagerly. He recognized the voices of Holland and Bliss. But the sound that had arrested him was a third voice, and this was not the voice of Busbee. It was the voice

of Ramon. Without turning to look he frowned, and then smiled grimly. Could it be that Ramon was going? He had not bargained for that!

Bliss was calling to him: "All ready?" And then: "Busbee backed out, and we've brought Greene."

Victoriano straightened up and turned about. Ramon was there, his color slightly heightened. He stood unobtrusively, yet holding his ground. "If there's no objection," Ramon added, supplementary to what Bliss had said. There was something pleasantly conciliatory in his glance as he looked at Victoriano.

Victoriano did not respond immediately. A little tardily he said, "No objection." He flung the coconut shell into the boat.

He would rather not have had Ramon along; but he could not humiliate him by saying so now to Ramon's comrades. His thought was that there was an adventure in prospect which might call for strength of body and a rough-and-ready disposition. But he could not say anything against Ramon without confessing a grudge against him, and he was unwilling to do this. He spoke almost curtly to Bliss: "Have you brought everything?"

Bliss thought they had done so. But Victoriano, critically inspecting what they had brought, suggested: "How about a tent?—and a hatchet, and ropes. Ropes, at least. We'll want to lash these things to the boat."

Bliss demanded a trifle humorously: "You don't expect to capsize us?"

Victoriano responded, "You can't tell."

Bliss and Holland went back to get the additional articles, while Victoriano placed those they had brought in the boat. He paid no attention to Ramon, who stood near him, characteristically helpless to aid,

or nearly so. But he had placed the last of the things in the boat before Bliss and Holland returned.

He turned to Ramon then without noting the faintly wounded expression in his eyes. He again smiled a little wryly as he asked: "How did you happen to get into this?"

"The war?" said Ramon, cheerfully enough. "Oh, it seemed the proper thing to do."

Ramon was always likely to choose a word which Victoriano would have rejected. "The proper thing?" he echoed; "you mean, the right thing?"

"Not at all," said Ramon. "I'm far from clear about its being the right thing. Rightly, only men used to hard tasks ought to undertake to perform hard tasks when much is at stake. No, I meant what I said—the proper thing. When there's a war the sons of men with a good deal of money or influence are expected to come forward and get in the way. However," he added thoughtfully, "I rather think I really wanted to come."

The others returned then; and Victoriano, taking the ropes from them, began to make fast the things he had placed in the boat. He would have fastened the rifles too, but Holland and Bliss objected to this. A soldier wanted his rifle ready at hand, they said. Only Ramon agreed with Victoriano, and so one of the rifles was made fast.

Victoriano assigned to each man his place in the boat, and with slow precision of movement he hoisted the sail. He called to the man in the stern to cast off.

With a smoothness like magic the craft slipped away, the sail filling instantly with a snapping sound. The island began to recede.

There was nothing in that pleasant launching to foreshadow the singularly dark episodes with which the

expedition was to end. The great bamboo outriggers were there with their promise of security, of stability. The sea was a thing of loveliness matched only by the sky. For almost half a league, it seemed, the sea was a shallow sheet of wholly transparent water overlying a bed of sand which shone like silver in the softly filtered light of the sun. Its bed was the home of pleasing and innocent things. There were starfish, little and solitary, softly gray against the silver; there were coral plants of the same gray, rising to almost snow-white tips; miniature trees of matchless delicacy and beauty. Fishes of an extraordinary splendor were visible: creatures of gold and crimson and yellow, spotted, striped. There were little sea horses, maintaining an almost upright position, drifting tremulously rather than swimming, seemingly helpless and lost yet innocently happy. The sea seemed a kind of mother to its family of innocent creatures, brooding over them as they lay on the silver bar in the soft light or drifted serenely with every hidden force that stirred.

Then suddenly—as if a horizontal curtain had been slipped into place—the floor of the sea was visible no more. A blue, almost opaque surface met the eye. But even yet it was merry and kind. It flung itself playfully into white-tipped waves no higher than a man's hand. It seemed alive with joy.

The native boat had settled down to a steady and uniform movement, swaying rhythmically from side to side, the outriggers slapping the surface of the water smartly, with a popping sound and a slight shock at every impact. The water seethed by. The sun, yet less than an hour high, flung a great patch like shattered hammered brass, a brilliant shaft-like space, on the face of the water.

Bliss's voice broke a long silence. "Look, fellows!" he exclaimed, looking back.

Behind them the island appeared to be almost submerged. Its outlines were softened, indistinct; a delicate vapor seemed to wrap it about. Its sister islands were strung out, similarly dim and unreal, along the horizon: Gawani, Taynan, Tawi Tawi. Tawi Tawi lay very far away, and beyond its extreme point the sea arose to a high horizon, silent, void, infinitely lonely.

The four men looked before them then, but the island of their quest was as yet scarcely emerging from its cloud-like obscurity. It was a great way off.

Silence again enveloped the men in the boat. A sense of boundless forces made itself felt. The impressiveness of this new situation made words seem trivial, perhaps even annoying. There may have been an indefinable suggestion of tragedy in their surroundings, too. They not only felt the power of the sea, but to their minds doubtless there came images of its cruelty as well. And yet there was no hint of peril. The blue sky bent above them peacefully, the breezes were pleasantly moderate.

Time passed; the craft sped through the water with a seething sound. A sensation of monotony had set in. And then, with shocking suddenness, disaster came.

It came invisibly, mysteriously: the essence of the thing was there rather than its outward sign—just at first. A guttural, roaring sound was heard.

The four men in the craft looked at one another with alarm. What was it, that shape of fear which had arisen in their path?

Bliss asked, in a perfunctory tone which did not hide his dismay: "What is it?"

Ramon replied: "It is wind."

Victoriano said: "I guess not." He scanned the sky to the horizon, noting its tranquil face. However, he promptly lowered the sail.

Holland arose a little in his place. "What's that?" he asked. He was pointing to the disturbed surface of the water a hundred yards away, directly in their path.

It might have been a school of fish agitating the water. There was the fretted aspect of a shoal. The waters danced: they seemed alive.

Suddenly each man gripped the edge of the boat and caught his breath. The craft had been seized by an invisible force and was drawing with incredible speed into that space of troubled waters.

It seemed nothing, at first. The buoyant supports of bamboo played their part well. The craft shot forward beyond the space of shoal-like ripples into a large circular area which had the smoothness of oil. And here the evil spirit of the place was found hidden. As if it were in the grip of an omnipotent, hidden hand, the craft turned completely over. The bamboo supports had become as nothing. Simply, with a kind of inexorableness, the thing had come about.

The four men were in the water, bobbing about like corks. Only their heads were visible. They were here and there, moving involuntarily—figures in a kind of ghastly dance. They remained close to the capsized boat, just out of reach of the four corners formed by the connecting ends of bamboo.

Victoriano's first thought was of the paddles which formed part of the craft's equipment, but which had not been used as yet. It occurred to him that these might be needed presently. One floated toward him

and he seized it. Then he asked himself the question: "Can they all swim? *Can Ramon swim?*"

He called out loudly—for the rush of waters here would have drowned a lesser cry—"Can you all swim?" But he looked first at Ramon.

They were all swimming. They did not seem alarmed. There had been a swift shock of amazement, but there had been no time for that sort of despair which springs from a deliberate thought of helplessness. They were all swimming in a somewhat dogged manner. Ramon's lips were pressed close together; he was taking rapid strokes; but just the same he was wearing a veil of self-sufficiency which he would have thanked no one to penetrate.

Victoriano cried out again—"Don't let the paddles get away!" And he noted with satisfaction that each man was able to seize a paddle. However, Ramon's paddle was an embarrassment to him; and he reached forth and took it, so that he now carried two.

Ramon did not forget to say, with an urbanity which seemed very thin and misplaced—"You needn't have minded." And he achieved a fleeting smile which did not, however, touch his eyes.

Victoriano was next conscious of various articles possessing a quality at once familiar and strange floating about him. There was a box of hard tack which had been opened and which was now spilling its contents on the water. It swirled about within reach of his hand a moment; then it was shifted away. There was an American pine box in which canned foods had been stored. There were miscellaneous parcels—coffee, bottles containing relishes. They bobbed about with a curious quality of animation, drawing together swiftly, drifting apart aimlessly—very like the movements of children. They began to

disappear, sinking, or being drawn away, never to be seen again. A square of hard tack, beginning to swell, followed Victoriano persistently; but soon it was far away, drifting, lost.

All this had occurred within the space of seconds. Men and craft and flotsam were borne together outside the area of mysterious oily sea; they were delivered over to a region of chopping waves and to a current which began to bear them evenly away.

The four men took their positions at the four corners formed by the bamboo outriggers. They did this without plan or agreement, without a word. They clung lightly yet securely to the support afforded them, retaining their hold with one hand while the other hand clung to a paddle. Whatever of dismay they had experienced passed away. They did not understand the mishap which had befallen them; but whatever it was it seemed to have passed. They were drifting away from that area of mysterious forces, borne quite gently by the current which had taken them up. If the outriggers of the capsized craft did not go to pieces or become unfastened, they seemed in no immediate danger.

They might possibly have righted their boat now by letting go the bamboo supports, by swimming under the body of the craft and working together. They might have bailed the water away, possibly, and made the boat again seaworthy, and have climbed back into their places, though this would have called for nice manipulation and great care. But unfortunately they were content to postpone the attempt to do this. They were safe for the moment: that was enough.

Before they clearly perceived the necessity of bettering their condition, before they began to realize that they might have to remain a long time in the

water, their strength began to fail them. Their limbs no longer retained the suppleness and vitality a supreme effort would have called for. It became apparent that a considerable risk would now attend any effort to better their situation.

The water was warm; they were not in distress. The supports to which they clung were holding fast. Better, they agreed, to drift aimlessly for the time being than to court unnecessary danger.

It was their unspoken thought that assistance of some sort might sooner or later be afforded them: that native fishers might appear, that they might drift within reach of shore. They at length discussed these possibilities. They were far from anticipating a terrible ordeal.

They asked one another what it could have been which had caused their boat to capsize. They were lacking in sea lore, and nothing in their experiences on land supplied a hint of those powers which had overwhelmed them without reference, seemingly, to natural laws. Their boat had turned over like a living thing, obeying an inner impulse, like a kitten on a mat.

Ramon suggested that perhaps they had sailed into a whirlpool. But this explained nothing. Bliss wondered if perhaps two conflicting ocean currents had not met in that region of troubled waters—or if perhaps a movement of the tide had not run counter to the power of one of those currents which mysteriously wend their way athwart the seas. This theory, in the absence of a more plausible one, was unanimously accepted.

They were now in the power of a current which moved steadily, without violence. They moved almost as rapidly as they had done when their sail was

in place, before their boat was capsized—only they were not moving in the direction in which they wished to go.

Presently they arrived at a disquieting conclusion. The current which bore them was running precisely parallel with the line of islands they had quitted. It was making for the empty sea far away beyond the last of the line of islands. It had many miles to go before it bore them beyond the remotest point of Tawi Tawi; but sooner or later they must escape from it if they were not ultimately to be carried beyond the reach of help, beyond sight of land.

Even yet they could not fully realize that genuine peril confronted them. They were not so very far from Bongao, after all: a matter of twelve or fifteen miles, perhaps. Its beaches were distinct; its skyline clearly defined. Their comrades were all there. Abundant help was really close at hand. Somehow they would make the island. Their chief mental discomfort as yet sprang from the fact that their outing was spoiled, that at least two of their rifles were lost, and that they must think of getting back rather than of pressing forward. They thought regretfully of having to put off their expedition until some other time.

Nevertheless, they presently decided that they must begin to try to help themselves. Not a native sail was in sight; and it occurred to them that even if native boats should appear later on, they themselves, in their partly submerged condition, would be invisible to others at even a comparatively short distance. They began to use their paddles, trying to draw away from that current which had begun to seem to them an inimical thing.

"If we try to pull together," said Victoriano, "we may be able to help ourselves."

They did not discover immediately how almost negligible was the effect of their efforts. The current drew from a great depth; its power and momentum held them inexorably. Their bodies were submerged almost to their chins; there was the dead weight of the submerged craft to hold them. Their paddles were short and rather narrow. There was no way for them to employ leverage or purchase. Clinging to their supports with one hand they plied their paddles at an angle which made movement difficult.

A gauging, little by little, of the odds against them, resulted at last in a change of their mental attitudes. Each man began to entertain obscure doubts and fears. No one voiced this change of mind; but all began to work more desperately, with an almost frantic determination. Holland, the one man in the group who seemed almost incapable of initiative action, began to indicate a measure for the movement of the paddles. "Now!" he exclaimed; and "Now!" and "Now!" He uttered the word with regular intervals between.

The others perceived the advantage of this. Each threw all the power he possessed back of his paddle when the word sounded. No other word was uttered for perhaps an hour. Then all four of the castaways perceived, as if simultaneously, that their best efforts seemed to be without avail. They could not note that they were any nearer shore. On the other hand, they perceived with disquietude that they were no longer abreast of Bongao. They were now drifting slowly and steadily past the second island, Gawani. They were drifting further and further away from possible help. They could be sure of only one thing:

by noting landmarks in a line on the island of Gawani they could perceive that they were moving rapidly—not shoreward, but onward to the open sea. With disheartening speed they were presently borne past the last point of the island of Gawani and were now opposite the third island, Taynan.

It was Ramon who seemed to hold longest to his courage—at least to the will to hide his dismay. He noted the morose silence which was settling upon the others. “There’s no need to be discouraged yet,” he said. He spoke casually, addressing no one in particular. “There’s all of Taynan yet and then Tawi Tawi. We’ve got hours yet. If we can only manage to gain a little!”

Then the problem of time seemed to replace the problem of distance. They had seemed to have time enough for anything when they began their adventure. Now it became clear that destruction might overtake them at last simply for want of time—because of the falling of darkness. The sun had passed the zenith by a considerable distance. It might be two o’clock now, or even three. And day and night in that latitude were nearly equal. To be sure, they had long hours before them in which to save themselves—yet time must not be wasted.

Presently their minds were taken off the larger aspects of their predicament by an incidental embarrassment. Their feet began to pain them acutely. They were swollen by the water; they had been in a measure suspended, so that the circulation of the blood had been checked.

Each man managed to remove his shoes, letting them fall as they came off. This was a great relief. They should feel the want of shoes after awhile; but this they could not help.

Later, each member of the group was forced to admit an even acuter form of distress. Their hands were failing them. Softened by the water, they could no longer withstand the pressure of the paddles. The skin came off in dead white ribbons. The bloodless flesh beneath shrank from contact, even with the water.

They exchanged positions with one another so that they might change hands in wielding the paddles. This proved an alarming experiment: they had not realized how unresponsive all their muscles had become. Moreover, the change proved to be a mistake from the beginning. It had been very difficult to exert any force with their right hands; it immediately proved all but impossible to accomplish anything with their left hands. Their former positions were resumed. Perhaps they had lost a little of time and energy by this unfortunate experiment, and they had placed an extra strain on the bamboo supports which might yet fall apart. Their depression increased. They resolved to ignore the protests of their flayed palms. They must not yield to trifles now. The horror of their predicament was becoming more apparent.

Holland's purposeful, "Now!" faded away like a faulty dye in the sun. It ceased entirely. Each man paddled with a desultory purpose, suppressing a groan with every movement.

Fantastic and seemingly incredible ills visited them. They drifted into a region of cold water. They could not understand how this might be. They only knew it to be a fact. The water was like ice. Their teeth chattered, they became numb. Their faces became gray and old. Their eyes stared at nothing. They drifted on and on. They were nearing the end of the island of Taynan now. There was yet a long

distance between them and the open sea; there was yet a long time between them and night. Yet time and the island of Taynan were relentlessly slipping by and they seemed as far from land as ever. They supposed they might have gained a few miles to shoreward, but even of this they were uncertain.

They came almost abruptly into warm water again. Little by little some measure of warmth was restored to their upper bodies. As for the lower parts of their bodies, they were scarcely conscious of these now.

Then the destiny which controlled them on that unhappy day revealed yet another source of gratuitous injury. The sky swiftly became overcast; the sun was sponged out; the day seemed to be ending; the rain began to fall.

Beginning to fall lightly, it slowly increased in volume, in violence. An unprecedented downpour set in. The universe was blotted out by sheets of water. The land and sky disappeared first; then even the sea became an immediate, limited space of splashed surface. The four men became all but invisible to one another. The violent dashing of raindrops reacted from the surface of the sea, rising in bubbles and mist. The noise was incredibly loud.

The rain came to an abrupt stop, but they came into an area of rough sea. There had been only a slight agitation of the waves before. Now a million crests rose and fell excitedly about them. The sea seemed shaken rather than swept or lashed. It was merely agitated, not angry. Yet the little malicious, disorderly waves had power to inflict punishment. They beat upon the gray faces lifted persistently. They let fall their salt crests upon nostrils and eyes and lips. They did this rapidly, with a suffocating effect. The victims of those waves gasped for breath.

This was not to last long. The sky cleared almost magically; the surface of the sea became calmer; the world seemed no longer a place of chaos. The long line of islands lay within sight again. The submerged boat and the silent, clinging men were now moving with funereal solemnity past a little opening which separated the islands of Taynan and Tawi Tawi. Tawi Tawi, the last of the islands, remained. Beyond lay the empty sea, cold in the late afternoon light—a region of certain death.

Victoriano aroused himself a little and looked about him at his companions. They seemed only half alive. Their features were pinched, their lids heavy. The dark sea was scarcely more dark than those human faces. Ramon alone was putting forth a shred of determination into his paddle-strokes. His teeth were set; his eyes seemed less spectral than those of his companions.

Bliss spoke, after hours of silence: "Would a fellow hang on until the very minute he died—and maybe longer—or would he turn loose a good while before?" he asked.

Ramon replied with a far-off echo of sharpness: "We'll make it yet. There's all of Tawi Tawi before us."

But Holland said on one note: "It will be dark in half an hour."

It was true. The sun, now free of the slightest vapor, was setting with a kind of seeming relentlessness in a cold sky. Tawi Tawi was showing a changed aspect: not quite obscure, but unutterably still and lonely.

The island was really not very far away. The efforts of the four men—with perhaps some little ironical aid from nature: a swerving current, the pressure of airs

—had brought the submerged craft to within a few miles of shore. But to what end? The battle had been fought and lost.

It was Victoriano who first saw the delicately lovely tower of wood-smoke arising from Tawi Tawi. It seemed earth's farewell to him, spoken with tender incense. To him it was eloquent of all earth's joys, of all human bonds. It epitomized all that men have wrested from nature during uncounted centuries: a little comfort, a season of companionship moving toward the breaking point, a frail harbor, a little love. And a winged faith? A symbol of salvation?

"Look!" whispered Victoriano. His voice trembled.

"It's supper time," said Bliss, to whom food was one of life's highest prizes.

"They are warm and dry there," said Holland, who had always craved companionship.

Ramon, achieving a wan smile, said: "The lady of the house is wondering what keeps her wayward lord."

Victoriano did not speak, but he would not take his eyes from that pillar of smoke, he would not look again upon the open sea.

Something in the expression of his face prompted Ramon to say, after silence had fallen again: "Victoriano . . . one time I drew a weapon in the presence of a lady. It didn't seem a serious thing—and yet but for that perhaps you wouldn't have been here now. If that is true I ask for pardon."

Victoriano, his face still turned shoreward, said after a pause: "There's nothing much in asking for pardon but just words. Nothing either in giving it. The past can't be changed by a word."

Ramon said: "No, not the past. But the present."

Victoriano waited again before he said: "Do you think *she'd* forgive?"

For the space of time that it required to make three strokes with his paddle Ramon considered this; then he said, "Yes. Yes, I'm positive." He added hurriedly, eager not to be misunderstood now—"Not because of her thought of me, but because of her compassion toward all mankind."

Victoriano could see her vividly then: the curve of her lips, the candor of her eyes. He said: "Whatever answer you find in your heart from her, that you may take as my answer too."

He had not ceased to gaze shoreward; and now the symbol of that rising smoke was expressed in a phenomenon which all the four men on the capsized boat could clearly understand. A figure became visible on one of the beaches before Tawi Tawi. A native man had emerged from a fringe, an obscurity, of verdure, and stood facing the sea.

He seemed no larger than a doll. He seemed infinitely far away. He stood perfectly still.

Victoriano appeared to come to life. He thrust his paddle above his head. He tried to shout. The other men lifted their paddles. Each man upreared his body to the limit.

Could they possibly be seen from shore? Was that motionless native who looked like a doll looking in their direction?

The figure on the shore remained visible an instant longer; then it turned away. It vanished into the obscurities of the verdure bordering the bar.

The four men out at sea stared. Each held his breath. A door stood slightly ajar. In another instant it would be either closed or opened wide. And for them life and death hung in the balances. Had the native seen them? Could he help? Would he?

An interminable moment : then the native reappeared, a little distance from where he had been before. He was thrusting a boat before him from its shelter of boughs.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW THE FOUR MEN END THEIR VOYAGE AND COME UPON AN EVIL SHORE

THE work of rescue would have seemed a merry occasion but for the disabilities of the four men on the capsized boat. The native who had put out from shore had apparently sounded an alarm, since his example was quickly followed by many others. Soon a dozen boats appeared along the green fringe of the island, all heading for the castaways.

The first of the rescuers to come up was an almost naked Moro with gleaming eyes and with a smile a little too fixed. He took in the situation quickly and flung a rope. He also thrust a paddle deep into the water and brought his own craft about with a graceful sweep.

It was Ramon who caught the end of the rope. He seemed instantly to have emerged from the aura of death which had enveloped them all only a moment before. An expression, almost blithe shone strangely through the gray imprint on his face—like something bright and valuable in a waste of ashes. "Now for home and mother," he cried out to the native with a sprightliness which was not too obviously spurious; and because his words could mean nothing to the native he added the simpler direction of a gesture toward shore.

Other natives had come up and looked on wonderingly, checking their crafts. They could scarcely under-

stand. They could not conceive the sea, during its periods of calm, as a menace. Fear of the water was unknown to them. Placed in the position in which the four Americans had been placed, they would have righted their boat promptly, laughing at what would have seemed to them a comic mishap. They had no conception of a kind of men who could swim only enough to keep afloat for a few minutes and who knew almost nothing of the vehicles of the sea.

The first native understood Ramon's gesture perfectly. He dug his paddle into the water and the line between his craft and the submerged craft became taut.

The other native boats hovered about like birds. There was a good deal of excitement.

The four Americans did not entertain any fear of what the land might hold in store for them. They had put the strange menace of the sea behind them, and they did not consider how nature may compass her cruel ends on land by means as terrible and various as those which she commands on water. It was natural they should fear the sea more than the land. They were familiar with the phenomena of the land, while the sea was strange to them: and men fear only that which is strange.

It was inexpressibly good to see the land become more distinct with every sweep of the native's paddle. They detected nothing malevolent in the eagerness of the natives who swept landward with them.

When Victoriano heard the native's paddle strike rock he knew they had reached shallow water. The beach was only a few boat-lengths distant. He sprang away from the submerged craft in his eagerness to touch land. The others followed his example. They thought of Columbus and how on one occasion he was said to have kissed the earth.

The result was unfortunate. The soles of their feet had become swollen and tender, their limbs had become numb. They all collapsed in the shallow water, falling forward on hands and faces. They held their faces out of the water and looked at one another. They remembered how to laugh again. They had all behaved foolishly! They crawled ashore, regaining little by little the use of muscles which had become all but useless.

They sat down on the beach while their boat was righted and bailed out. They considered what to do now. Their power to think clearly did not return immediately. It occurred to them that they must reward the native who had rescued them. They would have given him the world if it had been theirs. They felt that they would gladly have dwelt in a barren place, eating crusts, if this had been necessary in order to give the native what he desired as a reward.

The native could not understand that he had rendered an inestimable service. He had done nothing. He did not conceive that the white men had been in peril save from one source. He suggested that it was strange the evil fishes had not destroyed them.

Victoriano wanted to know about that. Evil fishes? And then he recalled the story of how Fanakan's husband had died, and other stories of the cayman, or shark, which infested the waters round about. He closed his eyes briefly. He was thankful he had not thought of this source of peril during those interminable hours when so many other sources of peril were in his mind.

However, they agreed that they must do something for the man who had saved them. For the others, too, in lesser degree. They made up a sum of money; but the native to whom this was proffered drew back smil-

ing nervously. He did not know what money was. He suspected it of having contaminating powers. He shook his head.

Holland had a ring with a cameo set. He slipped this from his shriveled finger.

The native's eyes danced. He took the ring falteringly. It was too good to be true—that this was meant for him. He placed it on his own finger. He held his finger up as if the ring might slip from it. He gazed at the ring in ecstasy.

They might perhaps have set sail for home then, but this did not occur to any of them. They were all exhausted. They crawled beyond the reach of the shifting water and clung to the warm sand. It comforted and quickened them like an elixir. They could have sung pæans but for their weakness. That warm sand was better than a perfumed pallet in Paradise. The sun had set. The very air was restful. The earth—the same earth they had always known—was lovely beyond the power of words to praise. It was supremely good to live for the moment without a single pang of thwarted ambition, a sense of loss. It was exquisite just to be alive, to lie motionless.

The natives drew apart and watched them and whispered among themselves.

They could not have said how long they lay so, motionless, supremely at peace. But at length Victoriano, sitting up, said: "I am hungry."

The words liberated a force which instantly assailed them all. They were ravenous.

Victoriano summoned the native who had saved them. He explained that he and his companions were in need of food. Could they have something to eat?

The native beckoned to his fellows. They parleyed;

and soon they announced that they would provide food. They invited the white men to accompany them.

They led the way along the shore to an inlet and a village, built on stilts. The people of the village came forth to see a sight. They admired the strangers and spoke secretly among themselves.

Soon food and other things were forthcoming: a fowl, rice, sweet water, a vessel, matches, fruits. To the natives who brought these Ramon made a promise. "When you come to Bongao," he said, "you shall have a ring, too." He held up a finger and traced about it a circle. He traced several circles, meaning several rings. He pointed to the ring which had been given the first native.

The four Americans then set about preparing a meal. They ascended to a low plateau rising above the village, overlooking the sea. They had their boat brought into a small inlet beneath them. The natives attended to this, contending with one another for the privilege of serving the strangers.

The plateau to which they had ascended held a cleared space where, perhaps, village festivals were sometimes held. Here they collected materials for making a fire. They cooked their meal in primitive fashion. They were alone now, the natives having withdrawn. Victoriano, handier than his companions in preparing a camp meal, silently took charge of this task.

Ramon also thought of something to do. Time and again he sauntered to the verge of the plateau and looked down into the inlet to make sure their boat was not disturbed. He did this casually, as if he were not suspicious. But he feared the natives and he realized how essential their boat was to them. Moreover, the

one rifle which had not been lost was there, lashed to the inner side of the boat.

Presently he suggested to Bliss that they go and bring the rifle and their other equipment up to the camp. Bliss agreed to this, and they both went, walking with much difficulty, down a winding path to the beach. They found the rifle where Victoriano had lashed it, together with a belt filled with cartridges, and a hatchet, and bedding.

As they returned to the camp with these Ramon caught a glimpse, quite by accident, of a native lurking in a screen of bushes not far from the boat. He looked again and perceived that there were a number of the natives, obviously hiding.

He was alarmed, though he took care not to show this. It occurred to him that the natives who had righted the boat had seen the rifle and other things. Perhaps they coveted them.

When he and Bliss reached camp he mentioned what he had seen—and his suspicions—to Victoriano. Victoriano reflected a moment; and then, "I'll have a look," he said.

He sauntered down toward the beach. He made certain that a group of the natives had assembled and were in hiding. He returned leisurely to the camp, his manner betraying no uneasiness, though his forehead was furrowed. He requested Holland to watch the pot; he suggested that Ramon take a hatchet and find more fuel. He suggested: "Don't seem as though you were at all worried, you know." He added to Bliss: "Get the rifle ready for use."

He went away toward the beach through the shadows which were now falling steadily. Night was fast approaching. He descended from the plateau and came upon the lurking natives as though by chance.

He accosted them frankly. He invited them to visit the camp. To his relief, they were quite willing to do so. He set off with them toward the camp.

He realized that his status here was different from what it had been when he mingled with the natives of Bongao. There he had had the protection and good will of the Datto. Here he was a stranger. He and his companions were doubtless regarded with fear, which is the mother of violence.

When he got back to the camp with the natives he seemed to note casually that Bliss was overhauling the rifle. He pointed to the preparations which were going forward about the fire; then he suggested to Bliss that the natives might be interested in knowing what could be done with the rifle. He knew that the natives were unfamiliar with firearms. He explained shortly to Bliss, in English, "They have never seen one before. It will be well to let them see what it will do."

Bliss comprehended. The work of the rifle would subdue any mischievous intention the natives entertained. He selected as a target an ancient coconut palm. He put a cartridge into the rifle and took aim, the natives looking on in a puzzled fashion. He fired, and Victoriano noted, without seeming to do so, that the natives were alarmed. They all went to note the result. The palm had been pierced through and through.

The natives examined the wound in the tree and then looked at one another agape. They cast fascinated glances at the rifle as if they wished to search out its secret. But when Bliss, at Victoriano's calm suggestion, offered to permit them to take the rifle into their hands, they started back almost hysterically.

"Very well," said Victoriano. He made it appear that he and his companions had meant merely to afford

friendly entertainment. He gave the visitors to understand that they might go. When they were gone he explained: "They'll hardly want to molest us now."

They ate their supper then, night overtaking them at this. Immediately afterward they were overcome by languor, by the need of rest. They chose places to sleep while the fire yet burned brightly. Almost instantly they lapsed into a death-like sleep.

Victoriano lay down almost without a thought of evil. The presence of others of his kind gave him assurance; and, moreover, he had much cause to be grateful to the men of the islands, and little cause to mistrust them. The zealots of Burriss's warning were evidently not numerous. He had encountered but one individual who would have harmed him, and the action of that one had been disavowed by all the others. He fell asleep gratefully. He had escaped a wretched fate on the open sea. The way back to Bongao was now open to him—and looming beyond, distant yet seemingly certain, was the delight of a return home.

But to Ramon the situation was different. He could not put from him the evil impression of enmity which he had drawn from those furtive and hidden men who had watched as he went down to the beach. He could not shake off a fear of evil, which had strengthened with the fall of night. And so it chanced that after he had slept for a time—he could not determine how long—he awoke with a start.

The fire had died down. A breeze stirred the white ashes and uncovered red embers which slowly faded. There was no longer any smoke. He sat up and peered about him. The others were lying like logs, completely relaxed. He heard their deep, regular breathing. Victoriano's face was partly hidden in a nest which he had made with his arms. Holland's face,

exposed, seemed ghastly white amid the surrounding obscurities. He was lying on his back, his arms flung out like a cross. Bliss was lying on his side, facing the other way. The silence of late night reigned. The restless breathing of the sea, monotonous and rhythmic, drifted up to the tableland. Of other sound there was none. The nearby village was asleep.

But in the very silence there was a source of subtle uneasiness to Ramon. It was spectral and furtive rather than peaceful. His imagination entered dark places and explored them and came upon troubled images. And presently his heart began to beat wildly. By those obscure agencies which operate when men first awaken from deep sleep he was apprised that prowlers were not far away.

He could not have said that he had heard anything; almost certainly he saw nothing. Yet he had the conviction that out of the obscurities of a fringe of vegetation not far away he was being spied upon.

Lacking the evidence which others would have required of him, he would not awaken his companions. Not yet, at any rate. They would certainly accuse him of fancifulness, of fear. They would ask questions which he could not answer.

He sat motionless, distressed by the pounding of his heart, wondering what had awakened him. A fairly open terrain lay about him in nearly all directions. Toward the interior of the island the plateau descended to a sparsely wooded field. On one side the plateau was bounded by a rude stockade which would have prevented a noiseless approach from that side. On another side of him there was the almost sheer descent to the level of the sea and the village in the cove. But on the remaining side there were clumps of palms

which shed a heavy obscurity like a pall. However, nothing seemed to stir here.

He could not be sure that he was not foolishly imaginative, that he was not suffering a reaction from the troubled events of the day; but also he could not recapture the spirit of repose. He could not sleep. And wholly as a precautionary measure he arose noiselessly and slipped away down that path which led to the beach and their boat.

He wished to make sure that the boat had not been disturbed. Perhaps his primary wish was to have something—anything—to do, in the hope that his nerves might be quieted. He took up the rifle and the belt filled with cartridges as he went. He did not know that he was exactly afraid, but it seemed no more than a soldierly precaution to go armed, and the rifle gave him a sense of security.

When he reached the beach he was reassured to find that the boat was just as they had left it, save that the receding tide had withdrawn from it. It lay keeled over, an outrigger supporting it. The stern lay lower than the bow and here several inches of water had settled.

He walked along the beach, alertly reconnoitering. He passed a number of native boats drawn up on the sand, their sails furled; and presently, in a small inlet shrouded by boughs, he came upon a boat which rode restlessly on the water. It arrested his attention because its sail was spread—as if, perhaps, it had put in from the sea only just now. He noted, too, the strangeness of the sail. It was of a solid color, of a rich crimson, as he ascertained by closer examination. But this meant nothing to him.

He returned to his own boat, the sensation of uneasiness slowly passing from him. A coconut shell

had been flung down on the beach and he took it up. He climbed into the boat upon which his own safety depended and began bailing out the water. It was good to have something to do. With his eye he measured the distance the craft would have to be moved for launching in the morning, if the tide did not flow in the meantime. The distance was only a few yards. One man might have launched the boat if occasion had required this.

He sat for a moment on the edge of the craft, noting the placidity of the sea, swelling rhythmically under the starry sky. A strange peacefulness enfolded the world.

Then out of the intense silence came a loud and fearful cry of agony: a mortal cry from the direction where his companions lay asleep.

Only a second he hesitated; then he flung the coconut shell from him and seized his rifle, which he had put down close by him. He sprang to his feet and ran up across the sand toward the camp. That cry was repeated: it combined itself with other sounds of horrible suggestion, the sound of blows.

He called out, "I am coming!" He dashed up the path and into the camp.

For an instant he was paralyzed by the spectacle which the dim light revealed. Of his recent companions only one was stirring. This one was Victoriano, he believed. At any rate, one furiously active body lay on the ground, fighting off the attack of a dozen natives who swarmed about like wasps, long blades in hand.

For an instant Ramon combated the paralysis of fear that held him; then the thought of peril to himself passed. Eyes and muscles and heart leaped with passion. "I am here!" he shouted; and he rushed toward that tangle of forms which surrounded his fallen comrade.

It was Victoriano, fighting savagely with his feet, swinging his body this way and that with amazing agility, thrusting one foot and then the other at the breasts and faces of his foes, driving them back. Then of a sudden he lay alone, with Ramon standing a little apart, thrusting cartridges into his rifle and firing at the retreating natives. They had fled when they realized that the deadly weapon of the strangers was about to be brought into play.

Ramon turned and looked down at Victoriano. Something was wrong with Victoriano. He was trying to rise and he could not. He tried to raise himself with one arm and then with the other; but each time he fell back helplessly with groans of pain and rage.

Ramon knelt down beside him, frantic with a sense of helplessness, because he could not see better.

"It is my arms," said Victoriano; and Ramon tried to examine his arms. He felt of them carefully. Something arose in his throat, almost stifling him. Victoriano's arms were dripping wet; there were deep gashes in them.

"They knifed me," said Victoriano, as Ramon helped him to a sitting posture.

"Only on the arms?" asked Ramon.

"Mostly," said Victoriano. He tried to support himself with one hand and again his body fell to the ground. "Look to the others," he said in a voice which he tried to hold steady.

Ramon turned to where the others lay. It seemed that they had both been slain. Holland was dead, certainly. He bent above Holland and his own face became distorted with horror. Holland had been decapitated. His head held only by shreds of skin. Blood was flowing from the headless trunk.

He turned to where Bliss lay. He groaned again

because he could not see; but it seemed that Bliss, too, was lost. He was moaning feebly, but rather like one who is unconscious than one who feels pain. There were wounds about his face and neck, and he lay in a pool that was warm and thick to the touch.

Victoriano's voice was heard almost calmly asking, "Are they done for?"

"Bliss is still alive," said Ramon. And then with a cry at once forlorn and furious he sprang forward. The natives were coming back. They were even now upon him.

He flung his rifle into position and discharged it once. He fairly reeled as he struck that one last blow, for he knew there would be no time to load again. But almost subconsciously he realized that the natives could not know this. And to his fierce satisfaction he beheld the advancing figures check themselves and turn back. Again they were gone: all but one.

One, a strangely weird creature with long flowing hair clearly meant to fling his life away on the chance of delivering one more blow. He knew no arts of combat; he relied upon the power of an impetuous rush. He came upon Ramon with arm upraised, dark blade erect. But Ramon possessed one last resource. He brought the butt of his piece forward with a lunge and the native, stunned by a blow on the face, fell back tottering, collapsing. But only for an instant. He recovered himself, and stumbling to his feet, fled and vanished.

"Good!" said Victoriano. He spoke quietly; but from where he lay he stared at Ramon wonderingly.

It seemed doubtful that Ramon had heard. "We must get out of here," said Ramon decisively. "We must get into the boat and be off. That's our only chance."

"You're right," assented Victoriano. The pain of his wounds was such that he could scarcely think. He thought he must soon bleed to death if death did not come in some swifter form. Still, he gave a thought to Ramon. He appraised him anew. He closed his eyes for an instant and Ramon stood before him vividly, a new Ramon: fierce, with the courage which comes from a sense of outrage; self-forgotten, because his companions had been foully betrayed. "You're right," he repeated; and his eyelids trembled and slowly opened.

Ramon was just in the act of thrusting a hand beneath his shoulders. "Come," he said.

But Victoriano could not conquer a sense of wonder, almost of incredulity. He lay inert. "Look after Bliss first," he said.

Ramon did not stir. "No," he said. "I'm afraid Bliss is done for. In any case, there's a better chance of saving you. You must come first."

Victoriano yielded, his sense of wonder deepening. He tried to help himself; he could not remember not to depend upon his own arms. He sank back heavily to the ground.

"You must take it slowly," said Ramon. He was speaking with a certain air of patience, of poise. He got both hands under Victoriano's body and lifted. He kept his body in balance while Victoriano got his feet under him. "Can you walk?" he asked. His voice arose scarcely above a whisper, yet it was firm and clear.

"I don't know," replied Victoriano; and then he added, "Yes, I think so. Yes, I'm all right. You look after Bliss now."

Ramon ignored that. "Come," he said. He took up the rifle and walked by Victoriano's side, steadying

him. They made their way to the boat together. With a few swift movements Ramon had the boat afloat. "Get in," he said.

Through the darkness Victoriano peered at him curiously, furtively. What had come over him? He had always seemed so gay and light a creature, of so little use in practical matters. Now he spoke crisply and acted with decision. He obeyed, climbing into the boat with Ramon's aid.

"I'll leave the rifle with you," continued Ramon. And he turned away.

Victoriano, suddenly aroused, thundered after him: "No—you'll take it with you!"

Ramon replied calmly: "I'll need both hands. I'm going to bring Bliss now."

"You must take it with you," repeated Victoriano harshly. "Our help must come from you. You must save yourself. Take the rifle."

Ramon turned—not to obey, but to explain. "They may be lurking about yet," he said. "If they know you have the rifle they'll not approach you. They don't know how badly you are hurt. They don't even know that you need the use of your hands to use the rifle. I'll be watchful. If they come I can run."

"But take the rifle!" repeated Victoriano; and now there was a new quality in his voice, which shook a little. But Ramon was gone. He was running up the path toward the camp.

His feet were bare but they were sound again. The soles had become firm; the muscles were functioning perfectly. Yet when he laid hands on Bliss he groaned in momentary despair. Bliss was not a large man, but how was he to be carried, now that every movement would cause his wounds to bleed afresh? He seemed to be clinging to life only by a thread. He was

moaning feebly. However, time was precious; and Ramon took hold of the prostrate body under the arms and began to back away toward the beach. He dragged the blood-soaked body step by step until he reached the steep incline. The going was easier then. Yet every fiber of his own body shrank and quivered when he noted Bliss's dangling head and heard the faint moans issuing from his frothy lips.

Happily his mind was divided. He was keeping on the alert against attack. And presently he was on the beach. By a supreme effort he lifted the unconscious man into the boat, placing him in a reclining position near the stern.

Victoriano watched him in silence. He had never wished so urgently to have the use of his arms as in this moment when they were useless, the muscles severed. And in his brain the wonder grew that Ramon could do so much unaided, in that brisk, matter-of-fact way.

He saw Ramon turn quickly again toward the camp. "What now?" he asked.

"We can't leave Holland," said Ramon.

Victoriano bent forward in the darkness. "I wish I could help!" he said.

"It's all right," said Ramon; and again he was gone.

Five minutes later Holland's body lay in the boat and the craft was shoved out into deeper water, where it was lifted immediately upon an outgoing tide.

"Do you know how to handle her?" asked Victoriano.

"I'll make out," was the reply. Ramon crawled back into the stern and took up a paddle.

"If you could raise the sail——" said Victoriano dubiously.

"I'll not try that. I wish I might; but it wouldn't do

to have another accident. We must be satisfied to go slowly. I have only to follow the line of islands. I can manage that."

When he had propelled the craft half a mile along the shadow of the island, when he had put that place of dark tragedy well behind him, he laid aside his paddle with a decisive gesture. He removed the khaki blouse he wore, and the cotton undershirt. He tore the shirt into strips. These he plunged into the salt water; and then he bent over Bliss. He bound certain of his wounds. "It will check the bleeding," he said. He bent closer. It seemed to him that Bliss's moans had become almost articulate. Then he crawled to where Victoriano sat. He removed Victoriano's outer garments and his wounds also he bound with cloth dripping with salt water.

As he worked Victoriano peered at him closely; and in a strange voice he said, "Ramon—your hands!" The flayed surface was bleeding.

"Never mind!" was the sharp reply. Then Ramon resumed his place in the stern and again the paddle began to rise and fall.

Within an hour the obscure shores of Tawi Tawi were left behind. Off the coast of Taynan Ramon put aside his paddle again. Again he dressed the wounds of Bliss and Victoriano, cleansing the strips of cloth and saturating them again. As he was turning away from Bliss he checked himself. Bliss was speaking to him!

"Are we going back?" asked Bliss feebly.

Ramon bent low over him, touching him on the shoulder. "Yes—we're all right now," he replied; then he hurriedly resumed his post.

An accident occurred not long afterward. There

was a jarring movement of the boat, a grating sound, and then a full stop.

"I must have got too close to shore," was Ramon's comment. He began to sound with his paddle. He could not find bottom.

"A reef, maybe," suggested Victoriano.

It proved to be a reef. Ramon felt about in an effort to shove off. He lost precious moments in this effort. Then he sprang out into the water, so that the boat, its burden diminished, might ride free. He was mistaken in this. He had waited too long. He resumed his place in the boat and tried again with his paddle. But the boat was caught fast.

In the meanwhile the tide was ebbing steadily. Soon the drab surface of a coral reef had emerged from the water. The boat had settled down on this shelf of stone and the sea had abandoned it.

It was Bliss's voice which broke a terrible silence. "Why don't we go on?" he asked fretfully.

Ramon could not reply, nor did Victoriano. After an interval of harrowing inactivity Ramon declared: "I must make use of it, at least." And again he bathed the wounds of his companions.

In each case the bleeding of the wounds had been checked, but a feverish condition had ensued, and the cold salt water was soothing.

Again and again he changed the dripping cloths, thankful for something to do; and it was thus that he was employed when the dawn broke.

The dawn should have brought solace, but it brought only new aspects of horror. The sea had withdrawn a great distance, it seemed. The boat and the men in it were perched high among a nest of jagged rocks. No human being, unaided, could have removed it. And there was the white face of Holland turned toward the

sky, the sightless eyes open, the mouth agape. Also, Bliss was now talking incoherently.

Ramon arose and covered the dead body of Holland with the sail, which was of no other use to him. He spoke reassuringly to Bliss. He turned toward Victoriano, trying to banish from his face the expression of despair which he knew it must wear. And then he found a ray of comfort. Victoriano, weakened by loss of blood, had slipped forward where he sat so that his head found an object to rest against, and now he was asleep.

So it was that Ramon watched the day in alone, and stared at his flayed hands dubiously—now that there was no one to note this. He was gathering strength for the final ordeal which awaited him. For already the tide was coming back. It was slipping higher and higher up among the nest of reefs. Presently it would float the boat again. Then he would be able to complete the distance which lay between him and home.

The sun had appeared now; its heat began to fill the earth and air. It shone on Victoriano's closed eyes. He stirred.

"You've had a nap," said Ramon.

There was silence again until Victoriano said excitedly: "Did you feel it?"

"What?" asked Ramon.

"The boat stirred. We'll be lifted off soon."

So it was. The shoreward sweep of the waves increased in strength; the boat was shaken again and again; it lifted; it caught fast; it lifted; it quivered—it went free!

It was mid-forenoon when Ramon sighted the point of land on Bongao which marked the location of the garrison.

He heard the querulous voice of Bliss: "Are we nearly home?"

"We'll be home in ten minutes," replied Ramon.

But only a moment later, when he glanced at Bliss again, he perceived that there were two dead in the boat instead of one. Quite easily Bliss had succumbed, just when aid was within reach.

Ramon spread the sail over a larger area, so that only he and Victoriano were now visible. He observed that Victoriano was nodding again, that he was struggling against a sensation of collapse. The heat had become extraordinarily intense.

For himself, he put all his remaining strength back of his paddle. He was all but at the end of his ordeal now. And he caught a glimpse of some one coming out of the company street, toward the beach—coming with an ever-increasing manner of alarm, swiftly, staring out toward the incoming boat.

It was Captain Standish who spoke as Ramon beached the craft.

"What is it?" he asked sharply.

Ramon stood up. His voice was gone, all save a weak whisper. "An accident——" he began. He could say no more. He tried to wink but it seemed he could not. The whites of his eyes were an angry red. The muscles of his face had gone rigid. Bewildered, he stared at the Captain out of those crimson eyes.

The Captain took a step forward and lifted the sail-cloth. He let it fall. He watched alertly as Ramon stepped out of the boat. It seemed that Ramon was about to collapse.

Victoriano opened his eyes. He saw men running toward him, their faces aghast. He could not lift a hand. He sat staring at them.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW PERFORCE THE SUN GOES DOWN UPON THE WRATH OF CAPTAIN STANDISH

VICTORIANO was taken back to the hospital tent, where he had found comfort and health on a former occasion, and the surgeon came promptly to examine him. It developed that his wounds were many and deep but not fatal. There might be a permanent stiffness of the arms, and of course there was always the possibility of infection. The surgeon frowned by way of expressing his perplexity. How could a man receive so many wounds, one very much like another?

Victoriano explained. He described the camp and the manner in which he and his companions had gone to sleep, exhausted and seemingly in no danger. Then, he said, he had been aroused by a cry from one of the others: either Bliss or Holland. He had opened his eyes to behold a swarm of obscure figures. He sprang to his feet just as that swarm of figures moved in his direction. It seemed that he, Victoriano, had been partly hidden up to that moment. Evidently Bliss and Holland had been finished, or had seemed to be, and it was now his turn. They had concentrated on him. He had begun to fight them off. He had been able to protect his head, using his forearms as a shield. He had realized that a blow to the head would pretty surely finish him. He had permitted his arms to be slashed until he could no longer hold them up. Then he had

lain on his back and used his feet just as he had previously used his hands—though it seemed to better purpose. He had done pretty well with his feet, sending more than one native reeling. Then of a sudden Ramon had rushed into the camp and the natives were running away.

The surgeon's frown was now a trifle whimsical. "Why didn't you turn and run?" he asked.

Victoriano weighed this. Presently he said: "I didn't know how things had gone with the other fellows. You know, Bliss was alive until half an hour ago. No, I couldn't have run."

He did not look at the surgeon. He was watching while his wounds were being washed and probed, and fragments of flesh and skin cut away and stitches taken. He remarked at last with a burst of candor: "They sure did mess me up a right smart."

Then he lay on his bunk again, idle, as he had done through many long hours before. It occurred to him that he must have managed his affairs badly at some time or another. He had never cared for adventures far from home.

He thought of Ramon. Ramon was certainly a surprise to him. He could go through with an ugly business as well as another. There was a good deal to him besides airs and graces. Perhaps it was no wonder that he looked good to a woman.

This reflection brought a sudden alarming question. What if Ramon should turn out to be the right man for Fidesia? He had education to match her own. He could talk smoothly. Certainly he did not talk as well as Fidesia could, but he did very well for a man. Was he the man she ought to take?

No, he wouldn't believe it. He couldn't afford to

go that far. Certain words of Ramon's stood out in his mind: "It was the proper thing to do." That was what Ramon had said about getting into the war. What was the difference between a proper thing and a right thing? There seemed to be a difference; but if one went to the height and depth of a matter, was there? However he looked at it, Ramon was looming larger in his mind. But so far as Fidesia was concerned, she was *his*.

As he reflected he heard an unfamiliar sound: a monotonous *rap, tap—tap tap tap. Rap, tap—tap tap tap. Rap, tap—tap tap tap.* Somewhere at the other end of the camp the company carpenter was making coffins for Holland and Bliss. He knew it must be that. His eyes burned with anger. He saw Holland and Bliss as they drifted at sea. And, after all, they had been murdered. They had been done out of their lives without a chance.

Then he had an astounding and mysterious experience. He was beholding that swarm of natives that had attacked him. One face stood out clear now that had not attracted his attention at the time. It was the face of a man who wore long black hair, and whose bearing was wild beyond belief. That man had slashed his arms repeatedly. It was that man who had returned for a final attack upon Ramon. And it flashed upon him now that that was the man he had fought in Fanakan's hut—the man who had slain Fanakan.

In the meanwhile Ramon had been summoned to the Captain's house and questioned at length. The surgeon, coming in later, listened to the account he gave, and studied his manner and face with dark intentness. Indeed, something in the surgeon's manner prompted Captain Standish to say: "That will do, Greene. You

must get some sleep. I'll want you to go with me tomorrow. You must be in shape."

Ramon understood perfectly what that meant. He was standing at ease, as the Captain had bade him do. An unwonted listlessness was upon him. He could scarcely help from drifting into a trance-like state; he had even done this while being questioned. He seemed awake with the sort of wakefulness which invites insanity and death. His blood-red eyes seemed to have lost the power to close naturally.

"You must get some sleep, Greene!" repeated the Captain sharply.

Ramon seemed not to hear this time. He was staring at nothing.

The Captain glanced significantly at the surgeon.

"I think he'll be able to sleep," said the surgeon, returning the Captain's glance. He added, nodding with special meaning to the Captain, "There are special occasions, you know, when certain 'drowsy syrups of the East' . . ."

Ramon smiled faintly, his eyes battling with their blank stare. "Shakespeare always did say the last word, didn't he?" he said. He continued to stare at nothing, while the faint smile faded from his lips.

Later it became necessary for the company first sergeant to disperse groups of men who assembled about Ramon's tent, all eager to hear at first hand the story of the capsized boat and of Tawi Tawi. The first sergeant, usually a mild man, stormed the group before Ramon's hut, and thereafter Ramon was left alone. He slept fitfully, though he would not be denied the right to follow the bodies of Bliss and Holland to the graves which were dug for them late that day, not far from where Burriss lay. Ramon stood rigidly at at-

tention when the salute was fired. Perhaps he thought all that was the proper thing to do, too.

Then, until late that night, ominous words were spoken about the garrison, and stern preparations were made. There was work to be done on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOW THE MOSAIC LAW IS GIVEN TO THE CHILDREN OF MOHAMMED AND HOW THEY ACKNOWLEDGE ITS MERIT

TWENTY native boats were lying side by side along the beach off the point of Bongao before sunrise the next morning. Twenty native sailors stood by ready to man them. With excessive pride each native had done his utmost to merit the praise and admiration of the strangers who were about to go upon a mysterious expedition to Tawi Tawi. Now the half-clothed men stood waiting, looking at one another inquiringly and a little anxiously, yet also with elation.

Captain Standish had conferred with the Datto Bagyan the evening before and the Datto had agreed to supply boats and sailors too. He would even lend his official interpreter, Lomofo. But for certain infirmities he should wish to join the expedition, he said. He considered the expedition, he added, a just and proper one.

A detail of American soldiers came down to the beach carrying supplies: boxes of canned meats and vegetables and fruits; desiccated potatoes, parcels of beans, boxes of hard tack, coffee, sugar, condensed milk, camp equipment. These were stowed away in the native boats. The soldiers went away and presently returned in light marching order, the first sergeant at their head. They stood along the beach, waiting.

Lomofo, the interpreter, arrived and took his station before the Captain's house. He was full of importance.

The first beams of the sun flooded the veranda before the Captain's house. For a time the veranda remained empty; then the door of the house was opened and the Captain appeared. He was putting the final touch to some part of his equipment; and then he stood in thought an instant, a rather splendid figure in the sun. A moment later he descended the steps. He seemed to note nothing unusual when Lomofo joined him and walked with him vaingloriously, like a game cock, out of step, absurdly, yet very much in earnest.

The Captain paused near the beach and looked frowningly at the craft which had returned from its ill-fated voyage the day before. It lay apart, abandoned. Tangka, from whom Victoriano had borrowed it, had not yet appeared to claim it.

The Captain spoke a low word or two to the first sergeant, who drew away from the hospital steward and other noncommissioned officers. Then the launching began.

The craft which led the way carried four men: the native sailor, Captain Standish, Lomofo, the interpreter, and Ramon.

Ramon seemed quite like himself again. He had marched down to the beach with a vigor which caused one or two veterans to consider him curiously. They knew there is a kind of energy which is spurious and temporary, which is related to that pride which goes before a fall. The surgeon also observed Ramon secretly. He frowned dubiously but he said nothing. It was necessary for Ramon to go with the others to Tawi Tawi if proper identification was to be made of those natives who were to be judged.

Ramon kept the palms of his hands down, concealed,

so that Captain Standish would not see them. He was also self-conscious because of his blood-shot eyes, though the congestion in them had begun to pass during the night. He felt quite equal to the task before him, and eager to perform it. He could not bear to have it thought that he was not fit.

He glanced back presently. The strange armada was following in an uneven line. Sails of every color and combination of colors caught the brilliant light of the sun. He could see the other soldiers, four in a boat. He knew that some would be talking excitedly, and that some would remain dumb, with bored expressions on their faces, and that some would be exchanging light remarks to conceal their concern. Some were young and some were middle-aged. He noted, too, that a favoring wind blew strong.

The Captain's boat slipped swiftly along the line of shore. The Captain was silent. Yesterday he had said all he had to say—until later. What his thoughts were one might have guessed. In his eyes was the stern expression of a father whose sons have been put upon. He was seemingly calm; but Ramon, glancing at his profile on one occasion when the Captain looked away, felt almost painfully thrilled. Here was a man who knew precisely what he ought to do, what he wished to do, and how to do it.

The sun rose higher. The line of boats became more ragged. The armada became a little scattered, though the foremost and the hindmost boats were less than a mile apart. The younger men among the soldiers had expended their stock of nervous energy and had fallen silent. They began to picture the violated bodies of Bliss and Holland, and the wounds of Victoriano; they were recalling the words of the burial

service; they were even casting moody glances at the natives who sailed with them.

Shortly after noon Ramon sat up more erectly in his place and scanned a slight eminence, a little to his left. They had been skirting the coast of Tawi Tawi. He addressed the Captain. They were arriving, he said: the village in the cove was just ahead, though yet out of sight.

The boat was brought around a low shoulder of shore, and there lay the village close at hand, a hundred yards across an area of tumbled rocks to which slimy seaweed clung like ooze.

The sail was lowered; the boat moved forward slowly. There was a moment's delay, and other boats moved up abreast of the first, their sails also lowered. The Captain looked back to note the location of the remaining boats. Nearly all were at hand. There were a few stragglers rather far away, but they were coming speedily.

There was a word of command and then the Captain left his boat. He stood knee-deep in a malodorous surf, placing his feet cautiously on invisible rocks covered with slime. The other boats were emptying quickly. Man after man left his boat and took his place in the surf. There was a faint note of comedy here and there when a man stumbled and fell; but this quickly passed. Soon a score or more of men, led by the Captain, were plunging unsteadily shoreward, rifles in hand, the rifles held high out of reach of the splashing salt water.

Lomofu paused for a final word to the native sailors: they were to remain where they were for the present. Then he hurried after the Captain, unaware of being rather absurd. Ramon was by the Captain's side. It seemed to him that the sea was needlessly filthy and

rough. He was concerned that none of the other soldiers should get ahead of him. He heard the splashing of the men behind him, like horses. He admitted to himself that it was somewhat difficult to move forward over slippery rocks, through swirling waters which hid obstructions and pitfalls, on toward the native village, rising on stilts above dark mudflats punctured with crab-holes.

He looked back. The others were coming: a belated boat or two was arriving and other men were leaping into the restless pool which moved wildly and made a spouting noise. The spectacular quality of it all pleased him. He mused: "An American punitive expedition is moving upon Tawi Tawi."

He lifted his head suddenly, startled. The village on stilts had undergone an impressive change. At first it had been deathlessly silent under the midday sun. Not a living creature had appeared. It had seemed wholly deserted. Now a weird sound had become audible: a noise like a death-chant, which began on a low note and gradually arose until it enveloped the village and drifted out across the water, making itself heard above the churning of the surf.

The women and children of the town were setting forth their defense.

The hideous wailing, rite-like, calculated, arose and intensified like the humming of bees. But as yet not a soul had become visible.

It was an acknowledgment of guilt, that wailing sound: perhaps a protest against a punishment which might fall upon the just and the unjust alike.

Captain Standish appeared to pay no attention to this. He crossed the last stretch of surf and mudflat and set his feet on rising ground, stamping once or twice. He looked about him. He had reached a some-

what stage-like area at the base of the plateau which rose above the village. It was empty save for an extraordinary old boat, long stranded: an antiquated boat, elaborately carved, curved like a galleon—the work perhaps of some impractical, imaginative village genius. A figurehead, vaguely incomplete, afforded a support for his hand.

The soldiers had followed him to this stage-like place, falling into the background, waiting. Now a few old men appeared in the doorways of the native huts, wearing candidly an air of disgrace.

Lomofo's proud hour had come. He assumed a rigorously official attitude and air: he summoned the men of the tribe of Tawi Tawi to come forward.

The old men descended from their huts and approached the strangers, while the American Captain stood looking down upon them curiously, quite steadily. When a small audience had gathered before him he began to speak: simply, yet with a certain quiet vigor.

"I wish every man of the tribe to show himself," he said. And after an impressive pause he added—"All! And if any man is seen trying to escape he shall be slain."

He waited for Lomofo to translate his words; but while Lomofo spoke he did not cease to gaze into the eyes of the elders of the tribe who had assembled. Subtly he put his own force and authority into Lomofo's voice, by that look which nothing escaped.

When the interpreter had spoken he turned toward the first sergeant and issued an order. This the first sergeant repeated, and immediately a number of armed men drew apart and took their stations where they could command all points of egress from the village. The Captain continued to stand motionless, a just Fate

whose power was made visible by those posted sentinels keeping watch upon sea and shore.

At intervals other soldiers arrived from the sea—the men who had come in the hindmost boats—and took their places silently among their comrades.

The village had become quiet: the wailing chant had ceased abruptly like the orchestra in a theater when the curtain is lifting. The elders of the tribe nodded assent to what had been said by Lomofo—or rather, by the stern, fair man of the ruddy skin and flaxen mustache and blue eyes which saw everything. They communicated swift and urgent messages to the various nearby huts.

The mandate spread and presently other men of the village, younger men, began to assemble, flinging themselves forward with an air of desperation. There was a period of delay. From remote huts a few natives appeared singly, and Captain Standish waited.

It appeared then that the tide had turned and was flowing with great rapidity. The mudflat about the village was being submerged; the slimy dark rocks along the coast were disappearing, the seaweed lifting to grace and life again. Presently a wave or two pushed itself forward to that space where the Captain and his men were assembled. The natives who were now arriving from the huts approached noisily, splashing through the water. Presently there were a few who came in boats.

But the men who were sought for did not appear. Ramon, searching each face and form as it drew near, continued to look to the next, and the next. The assassins had not come forth.

The Captain spoke again, this time with the effect of setting a stage, of writing down an hypothesis:

“Day before yesterday some of my men landed here

on your shore. You received them as friends. Gifts were exchanged. They thought they were among honorable men. Yet to-day two of them are dead and one of them is maimed. I must know who did this. They must be delivered over to me."

He seemed a little larger, a little sterner, as he gazed from face to face while his words were being translated.

The elders looked at one another and sent messengers. There was another exodus from the remoter huts: other men, with a few mere boys among them, approached the place of judgment.

But even yet Ramon searched the strange faces in vain. He was seeking a man with flowing black hair; but also he was searching the throng for any of those faces which he had looked upon when he had been rescued from the sea. Something whispered to him that there lay the source of the crime—that there the beginning of the inquiry must be made. And suddenly he caught the furtive eye of a youth who had approached stealthily and who quickly sought to avoid his glance.

He pointed. "Let that man be held," he said. This was a man with a scar on his cheek who had been among the rescuers. He was trembling with alarm. He was placed aside under guard.

"The others? Where are they?" demanded the Captain.

The elders shook their heads. They did not know, they said.

"You must not say 'We do not know,'" said the Captain. "You must produce them. All the members of your tribe are not here. I must see them all."

A rifle-shot gave harsh emphasis to his words. A sentry on a distant point had fired at a native in a

boat who had sought to escape from the remoter edge of the village. The fugitive only plied his paddle the more vigorously. A second shot was fired. The boat moved onward. There was a third shot, and the native sprang up and fell into the sea.

Other soldiers put out in boats to bring in the wounded native. And at the same time there was a new sprinkling of natives from the huts. They came hurriedly, in terror. They could not withstand the sound of firearms.

One of the newcomers rushed toward Ramon imploringly and dropped to his knees.

"This is another," said Ramon; and the native, without waiting to be accused further, abased himself and begged Ramon to slay him with the bayonet at his side. He pointed to the bayonet and then to his own throat. When Ramon continued to look at him, motionless save that he was breathing deeply, the native sought to take the bayonet into his own hands, that he might put an end to his own life.

This man also was placed under guard.

A native boat manned by two soldiers glided up to the scene of judgment. A native lay in it, on his back. The hospital steward went forward and lifted the recumbent figure into a sitting posture. It could be seen that the injured man was inhaling and exhaling through a wound in his side. Bubbly froth stirred about the wound. He betrayed no evidence of pain or fear. He refused to look at any one. His wound was dressed and he was carried away.

The natives paid little heed to this. If they pitied the youth they gave no sign. They were looking curiously, almost stolidly, at the Captain. They had not a glance, or more than a glance, for Lomofo.

The Captain spoke again. "There are other men

in the houses," he said. "They must come out. Soon I shall send my men into all the houses, and it will not be well for any who are found in them."

This brought a windfall of a dozen or more. From one isolated hut a boatload of lepers came; and from other huts came some who were incredibly old, and some who were ill and had to be aided: the broken fragments of the tribe.

A hush imposed itself upon all when one of the lepers, a youth of noble carriage, stepped forward and waited with dignity to be dismissed. He turned and went back to his place without a word when the Captain said: "See that these are not disturbed again."

Then orders were given to search the huts; but before this order could be obeyed there was an interruption. A belated craft was gliding into the cove, moving calmly, alone.

The Captain stared darkly for an instant, and then he withdrew his attention from that late-comer. It was Victoriano, sitting austere in his boat, with Tangka at the helm. With Tangka's aid he got to his feet and stepped ashore. "I didn't want to be left out," he said. He gave a second glance to the Captain, evidently being a little puzzled by something rigid in his manner; and then he moved forward to mingle with the soldiers.

The soldiers were now ready to examine the huts. They dispersed and entered the huts one after another. Victoriano took part in this business. A kind of informal period had come, and he moved about at will without attracting attention.

But it really seemed that the men of the tribe had all obeyed the summons to show themselves. There were no men in the huts. Women and children gazed darkly at the intruding soldiers.

The search went on in a leisurely way, with here and there a little bustle and confusion. In the midst of this Victoriano paused before a remote hut, a larger hut standing apart and surrounded, it seemed, by an atmosphere of its own. For the moment no American was near him.

He looked in at the door and an expression of amazement slowly came into his eyes. "We'll just step in here," he said to Tangka, who attended him. A familiar object on a shelf in the hut had caught his eye. He entered at the door and stood looking about him curiously.

Tangka touched him urgently on the shoulder. "Not here," he whispered in terror. "This is the house of those who are accursed."

It was the house of the lepers.

But Victoriano held his ground. That familiar object on the shelf remained in his eye: a glass jar which had at some time contained chipped beef, but which now held a smear of yellow paste.

He gazed at the floor thoughtfully, trying to remember. And suddenly he caught his breath sharply and a spasm shook his useless arms. His eyes blazed. He had caught sight of a wisp of coarse black hair falling outside the cover of an old mat in a corner.

He turned his gaze upon Tangka silently, warningly. His own glance traveled significantly back to that wisp of black hair.

He was astounded by the first full revealment he had had of Tangka's quality. Tangka drew his kris almost airily. With the alacrity of a terrier he stooped and jerked away the old mat. He stood erect, perfectly balanced, ready, his kris lifted. And then in a tone of profound astonishment he cried—"It is Antero, the son of Fanakan!"

But Antero was not formidable now. He seemed scarcely to heed the presence of Tangka. He groveled at Victoriano's feet, imploring mercy.

A soldier appeared in the doorway, his eyes contracting as he faced the shadowy room.

"There's a man here," said Victoriano. And he stared at the native with brooding eyes as the soldier came and led him away. Among the island people he had had one friend more faithful than all the others, and this man had slain her.

Still brooding he turned toward that glass jar which had caught his eye. He remembered now. It was the jar containing mutton tallow which he had given the Datto long ago. And suddenly he was conscious of eyes strangely like the Datto's gazing at him mournfully. A youth of higher caste than any Victoriano had met stood before him: a stricken youth whose skin was scaling away, whose eyebrows were gone, whose head was covered with ulcers—yet who held himself as if he were a prince.

Victoriano guessed the truth. "You are the son of the Datto," he said. He recalled the story of the Datto's son; he remembered how he had seen the Datto sailing alone to Tawi Tawi once upon a time.

"I am Manu, son of Bagyan," the youth replied. He gazed at Victoriano wonderingly.

"But why——" faltered Victoriano, "is there no place nearer home for you?"

Tangka whispered in his ear: "He is a leper."

The youth said sadly: "Tawi Tawi is my home."

The word lodged in Victoriano's consciousness for the first time. "An odd name," he mused. "It is like music." He could not speak of Manu's misfortune; there was nothing to be said. He would not ask if the

salve his father had brought had proved useless. He knew the answer to that question.

He turned away and stood in the doorway, a sense of tragedy weighing heavily upon him. Horror seemed to clothe him. He slowly analyzed what Tangka had said of that hidden man with long hair: he was the son of Fanakan. The son, and the slayer! Then he thought of the mystery of the Datto's life, which had stamped him with darkness and silence for all time to come: and here behind him was the source of all that sorrow, a youth who should have been in the bloom of youth, but who was exiled from his home, a sufferer, lost.

He lifted his eyes to the land before him. A patriarchal palm stood high against the blue sky, with lesser palms beyond. A fleecy cloud drifted by. All was serene and beautiful. That island might have been Eden before the day of Cain—that island which had been named Tawi Tawi. He repeated the name to himself; and then: "What does it mean?" he asked.

What did the name of the island mean?—or what did the contradictions of nature mean?

Behind him Manu, son of the Datto, was gazing into vacancy. Perhaps he had heard that question and thought to answer it. In a mournful whisper he said—

"I bear my cross."

Victoriano went away. He did not know whether the youth's mind was dwelling upon his own terrible fate, or whether he had made reply to the question which had been asked. He moved out into the sunshine with the words haunting him—*I bear my cross*. He stood musing a moment. If that was what the name meant, how many men and women there were throughout the world who might wear the name of

the island as a badge! What heart was there anywhere which might not be stamped with that bitter cry!

He aroused himself. The soldiers were assembling. He moved away to join them. The native who had been found in the hut of the lepers was now among the prisoners.

He caught a glimpse of Ramon's face. Ramon was staring at this last prisoner, and his eyes were filled with incredulity in which there was also terror. He had recognized the zealot, the juramentado, who had led the attack against him and his companions.

The sun was now sinking below the island's line of vegetation; the sea was washing in almost violently under the huts and about the slight elevation on which the soldiers had assembled. The moment of high tide had come: the water would soon begin to recede.

The Captain made a final announcement: "You may disperse now," he said to the assembled tribe. "But if by to-morrow you do not deliver up the murderers among you I shall destroy your village with fire, so that not a house shall remain."

The tribe dispersed thoughtfully. It was probable that they had perceived the visitors' intention to be just rather than revengeful. If they were depressed, therefore, they were not resentful. A heavy silence fell upon the village.

The Americans ascended to the plateau above the village. There were routine duties to perform. The prisoners were bound to posts which had been erected perhaps during a period of festivity for a swing. They submitted silently, even calmly.

Details of soldiers carried the stores of supplies from the boats up to the plateau. The native sailors were disposed of for the night. A fire was built in the temporary camp. A guard was posted. Another

group of men prepared supper so that every one was presently fed, including the prisoners, who accepted everything passively.

Darkness enveloped the plateau; the stars brightened in the sky. Strange constellations were visible; the Southern Cross hung sideways in its place. The soldiers prepared for sleep.

Victoriano came close to where Ramon was making a place for the night. He lay down in silence. He could not clearly understand why he wished to be by Ramon. Ramon helped to make him comfortable, and even while he was expressing thanks he fell asleep.

But Ramon did not sleep so easily. He turned so that he could look at the prisoners where they were bound. Captain Standish was talking to the prisoners, aided by Lomofo. He held a candle in his hand so that it lighted the face of each prisoner as he talked to him. He held the light close to the prisoners' eyes. His voice was calm, insistent, monotonous. Ramon felt confident that before the Captain slept he would know all the prisoners knew.

Quite a long time afterward he looked again, rousing himself, to where he had last seen the Captain. The Captain was now lying down, a poncho drawn up over him. But Ramon could see that he was yet awake.

Ramon lay ruminating, staring at the sky, which was full of mysteries, though not more so than the earth. It was all one mystery. A wan smile played about his lips. "He said he would burn their houses," he mused. And presently he added, "He meant it, too."

Ramon was right about one thing, at least. In the morning it developed that the prisoners had revealed to the Captain the names and hiding places of the men who had been guilty with them. They told everything.

There was a brief parley, after breakfast, between the Captain and Lomofo; and as a result of this the native sailors from Bongao were summoned. It was clear that the offending natives who were in hiding would escape at the sight of Americans, and so the sailors were sent also to capture them.

It was a task requiring much time; and perhaps there were moments during the day when Captain Standish felt that it was a plan of dubious issue. But by mid-day the sailors began to return by twos and threes, bringing the fugitives with them. Party after party appeared, and always there was one with each party who refused to look at any one, but who was prepared to accept whatever punishment was planned for him.

The group of prisoners at last numbered thirteen. It was said that all who were guilty were now in hand. And suddenly they all manifested a singular eagerness to confess their various parts in the crime which had been committed. There was one who related—almost boasted—how he had severed the head of one of the Americans with a single blow. Another declared he was the first to attack the second American; others, with a certain sedateness, insisted upon describing how they, too, had taken a hand in disabling this man. One produced a hatchet—the property of the company—in proof of his statement that he had been a member of the band.

A number bore testimony to the fact that the third American had fought with great determination, with his hands and later with his feet. He was too active for them: too active and too powerful. He would not give up, and they had been forced to abandon him, since the fourth man had appeared with his terrible weapon, which would pierce a tree.

The Captain drew away from them with an air of

relinquishment. He drew apart with Lomofa and with certain elders of the tribe who had assembled on the plateau. He seemed unaware that the first sergeant had had the prisoners bound one to another and had given instructions to have them conducted away toward the inland. The chain of prisoners, followed by the soldiers, disappeared.

The bound men guessed that their time had come. They manifested no fear, no resentment. They sought occasion, as they moved, to salute one another. They faced one another, rubbing their noses together. Their eyes were a little visionary in expression. They had strange sources of consolation. They were beautifully built, like perfect bronze statues come to life. They were lithe of limb, narrow of loin, deep-chested for men so young; they moved with the ease of panthers. They disappeared toward the interior, the soldiers following.

A few moments later the Captain in his place on the plateau experienced a passing contraction of his muscles. He had heard the sound of a volley. He seemed in a sense regretful, but entirely resigned.

Very soon afterward the people of the tribe were again summoned before the Captain. He now stood under a sort of canopy which had been erected for him during the day by reason of the severe heat.

The natives began to climb the plateau one by one, by twos, in little groups. They wore an air of not wishing to look about them too curiously. They had heard that volley. It was mysterious, like the will of Allah, but not to be mistaken. They formed a funereal group about the American officer, stationing themselves according to their tribal honors, their ages. The old men squatted down, not wholly unlike frogs, in the

foreground. Others came as far forward as they could get. Down in the village a gong sounded and from far and near other natives assembled. They came to the number of a hundred or more, climbing up to the plateau. Gradually their spiritual burdens seemed lightened. It might have been supposed that they had been summoned to some sort of festival.

The Captain waited until all were present. His burden, too, seemed to have been diminished. He was too much a man to adopt grand airs, to indulge in conscious drama. He was fitted by some inherent gift or quality to be the friend of a benighted people. He was in essence a simple, kindly-mannered man. His fair face became almost a little benign: not tender, but in a generous sense strong. He began a deliberate address, with little Lomofo, shadow-like, all but effaced, repeating his words sentence by sentence. The few palms on the plateau were hushed; the sea's murmur was very far away.

"Three days ago," began the Captain, "some of my men came to your village and were followed to their camp by a band of your men. These men pretended to be like brothers, yet when their chance came they tried to kill them all." (He manifested by look and tone his contempt for treachery. He was not acting. He was greatly in earnest.) He paused a moment and his eyes, with their serene light returning, wandered from face to face, especially to the faces of the old men. Then he resumed:

"But that is at an end now. The treacherous men are dead because of their treachery. I believe the rest of the men who live in this village are good men and our friends. I believe we shall come to know one another better and to help one another. That is our wish."

The elders, squatting in the front row, nodded their heads approvingly. They made guttural noises in their throats.

"We wish you to come to Bongao to see us, to be friendly with us," continued the Captain. "I now invite you to come to me as a friend. You need not bring weapons, since we shall not wish to harm you. The soldiers are big men with big hearts. They will be your friends. If any soldier shall ever treacherously slay a Moro that soldier shall in turn be slain by us."

Again the heads of the elders nodded, and the rumbling sound of approval, a little louder, was heard.

"But," he resumed, "my men shall come again to your island, to hunt, to explore, to offer you their friendship, and if ever you slay another one I shall come back here and remain a day, a month, a year, but I shall not leave until that man is avenged. And if men from a distance ever come here to abuse you—Spaniards, or any other people from over the sea—you come to Bongao and tell me, and we shall see!"

The faces of the young men in the background were alight now. A cheer arose. The old men nodded many times.

"Now," concluded the Captain, "as a token of our friendship we are going to give you the stores we brought." He pointed to the goodly heap of provisions near by. "And you shall accept them as a token of our friendship. And hereafter, because of this gift, we shall call each other friends."

The audience was ended. A period of rejoicing followed. The natives could not do enough to show their gratitude, it seemed. They offered their best boats to facilitate the voyage back to Bongao. They divided

the provisions among themselves with the avidity of blackbirds. They were extraordinarily happy.

On the return voyage Ramon and Victoriano rode together in Tanka's boat. Ramon was at last suffering a reaction. He did not seem ill; he seemed rather like one a little puzzled and having many new matters to think about. More than once Victoriano glanced at him thoughtfully, trying to behold him anew, aright.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW VICTORIANO AND RAMON RIDE BACK TO BONGAO AND HOW VICTORIANO MAKES A DECISION

THERE was a casual atmosphere about the fleet of native boats as it sailed back to Bongao. It did not seem to matter whether the boats kept together or whether the wind blew or a calm befell. Captain Standish and Lomofo and the first sergeant rode in silence.

The men in the other boats dallied unrebuked. Their day's work was done.

In Tangka's boat Victoriano and Ramon regarded each other with some new manner of restraint between them. There was much to say but for a time it remained unsaid. Tangka regretted this. He was curious about Ramon, who should have been like Victoriano, he thought, since they were of the same breed, but who was not at all like him. He would have been glad to hear him talk, to study him as he uttered words. That was one way of finding out about a man. But Ramon was musing darkly.

Victoriano would not break in upon Ramon's reticence. He thought of something he wished to say to Tangka. "I thought the sons of Fanakan were both dead," he said. "I mean, long ago."

"We thought so," replied Tangka. "That was the report. It seems plain that he was shot by the Spanish soldiers at Jolo. There were many scars on his body.

It seems that by some miracle he escaped. He may have come back to Bongao unknown to all. Fanakan may have hid him. She used to love him best of all. Maybe she did to the end."

Victoriano nodded. Yes, Fanakan had shielded her son Antero, the zealot, the juramentado. He was positive of that. There was no other explanation of many things: her terror, her vigilance. It was of her son that Fanakan had said at the very end—"I would have saved him and I could not." Her fears had been for her son. Antero had been about the hut many a night. He had been in Burriss's hut, after the slaying of Burriss. He had desired to slay the unbeliever who was his mother's guest. And she had wished to prevent it for her son's sake—and perhaps for other reasons too. Yes, certainly for other reasons.

Tangka was saying: "He must have been about when we didn't guess it. It was he who was seen in a boat with a crimson sail—we may be sure of that now. He had the same sail at Tawi Tawi."

Victoriano nodded. He was thinking sadly of Fanakan, the old woman of a lost island, who lived in a hut far from any one, weaving her mats in silence: yet what woman in purple and gold anywhere in the world, of any time, had sounded life more deeply?

Ramon was speaking at last. "We've come pretty far from home, Victoriano," he said.

"We have," replied Victoriano, rousing himself.

"And got pretty completely out of our own orbit." He smiled wryly and added: "What has all this"—he waved his hand vaguely—"got to do with you and me and home?"

Victoriano appeared a little awkward, sitting stiffly erect with his arms bound to him. "You mean, we don't belong here?" he asked.

"Surely we don't!"

"I don't know. It's been good for me to be here. I'm beginning to see that."

"I wonder why?"

"I'm getting better acquainted with myself for being here." He added with an effort: "I'm getting to know you a great sight better, too, Ramon."

Ramon's glance fell. There was a quiet, restrained eagerness in his tone when he asked: "Are you?" And then—"I wonder what you've got to know."

"That you're a better man than I ever took you for," said Victoriano.

Ramon smiled with delight. "Well, I declare that's good!" he said, his face flushing. He added, "I'm certainly glad to hear you say that!"

He didn't wish to have anything more said for a long time. Admiration he was used to; but this, from Victoriano, was something better. He sat, repeating Victoriano's words to himself. He began to perceive Victoriano anew. He thought he understood more clearly what he represented. That quality in Victoriano which he had regarded as a kind of provincialism—in what a new guise, in what large degrees, he was finding it! He had been observing Captain Standish during a period of stress, and Captain Standish seemed another Victoriano: a more thoroughly developed Victoriano, doubtless, and in a higher place. But another Victoriano just the same. His fancy went beyond that. He caught, vaguely, the meaning of America itself; and it seemed to him that it meant what Captain Standish meant and what Victoriano meant. America had been at work on Tawi Tawi. He had seen America at work at home, of course; but he had not understood, because it had come to work in more complex ways at home. But on Tawi Tawi it

was writing on a new page. He could perceive the gestures it made, could read the characters it was writing. He could perceive its purpose and method clearly. It was not aloof, nice, cynical; it was not good at words, save that it had simple words for a crisis. It was the apostle of action. Not perfect action, but the best that was possible. Its way was to hew the timbers with pain and sweat, and not to rest under the trees.

He sat with his hands before his eyes a long time, resting both hands and eyes, which ached. He had felt drawn closer to Victoriano; but as he sat a figure came to occupy a place between them, to separate them, to estrange them. The figure of Fidesia was there, the woman both desired, whom only one might possess.

The heroic image of Victoriano faded from Ramon's vision. He was uncouth: that was his quality. He was sane and sound, but he was crude. He was arrogant because of his strength—so thoroughly arrogant that he could be arrogant in silence. His boasts were expressed by silence. He might be typical of America. He was. But America was a braggart, for all its merit. In the company of other nations, cultured nations, it brought sly and reticent smiles to the eyes of those other nations. And that deed back there on Tawi Tawi: wasn't there bigotry in it, and judging?

He dropped his hands from before his eyes impatiently. There was a changed quality in his voice as he turned to Victoriano and asked: "Did you hear that last shot?"

Because of the puzzled expression in Victoriano's eyes he added—"I mean, after the volley was fired."

"Oh!" said Victoriano. "Yes, I heard it. I saw it fired."

Ramon stared. "You mean you followed—to see the end?"

"I did."

"You wanted to see them die?"

Victoriano hesitated only an instant. "Yes," he said.

Ramon frowned. "But didn't that last shot seem one too many? You see, they had all dropped at the firing of the volley. They were as quiet as logs—all save one. One man was living, to a certain extent. His body was weaving. If he had escaped . . . why shouldn't they have turned their backs? I mean, all of us?"

Victoriano pondered. At length he said, "You fired, too, Ramon, when the others fired the volley."

"Yes, I know I did."

"Yet you're wishing that one might have been spared?"

"No, not that. I fired with the others because I couldn't shirk. It was a dirty job, but it was mine as much as the others. I'll confess: I meant not to fire, at first. There were plenty of others. But I pressed the trigger just the same."

"That was right, of course," said Victoriano. "And yet you——"

"And yet I don't like to think of that final shot. It seemed like interfering with the fates, like taking things too arrogantly into your own hands. Why not leave a few things to chance, on the theory that we might be wrong?"

"They were all equally guilty," said Victoriano.

Ramon laughed unpleasantly. "How do you know they were?" he asked; "that's hard to say. That's a matter that involves a lot of things."

Victoriano was trying laboriously, slowly, to follow; but Ramon was looking back in the wake of the boat where the water curled and foamed. Before Vic-

toriano could think of words to utter Ramon was continuing in a tone almost like banter, yet with a certain earnestness too: "We got switched on this last outing, Victoriano. You got into my place and I in yours. It should have been I who got my arms hurt and you who came running up from the beach with a rifle in your hands. You'd have done it all better. You'd not have got us on that reef. You'd have taken it all quietly, like packing a horse."

"You did it well yourself," said Victoriano.

"Oh—I suppose I did what was proper."

Victoriano frowned. "You did what was right," he said.

Ramon smiled. "Maybe," he said; "but just the same, for the past half hour I've been trying to forget——"

He hesitated and his eyes filled with a dark, reminiscent shadow.

"To forget what?"

"Oh, how those poor devils tried to bid one another good-by—and how they were unafraid, even to the end."

Victoriano's reply came promptly, vehemently: "You might better remember how Bliss looked at you and spoke to you just before he died."

They fell silent for the remainder of the voyage. Ramon was reflecting: "You can't bend iron. You can only break it—if you're strong enough. It's only the precious metals that can be wrought into forms of beauty."

But this was scarcely just to Victoriano, whose conceptions in many ways continued to change and reshape themselves during that voyage. He was thinking: "Ramon's upset. He's had an awful trial. He's right at heart."

He continued to glance occasionally at Ramon, upon whom something almost like a stupor had descended. He kept his eyes upon him when the time for landing came. He was relieved when Ramon gathered his effects and sprang out on the beach, calling out light words of banter to one of the soldiers who had stayed behind to guard the garrison. Then something happened. Ramon stopped short and looked about him, at the familiar house of the Captain, at the company street with rows of neat huts on either side. Then his rifle slipped from his hand; he tottered an instant. A sharp cry of agony escaped him, and he fell unconscious on the beach.

The surgeon was beside him quickly.

"It's his heart," said the surgeon. He sent for bearers and his medicine case. To Captain Standish, coming up, the surgeon added: "I thought he was coming through the whole thing without harm. We may have to reconsider that point."

By strange chance a vessel moved slowly around the point of the island at noon the next day. It brought recruits to relieve those men who had enlisted only for the period of the war, and discharges for the men whose work was done.

A discharge should have come for Ramon, but by some mischance it did not do so. Captain Standish went so far as to express his regret to Ramon, who had recovered quickly from his collapse of the day before. "Yours will surely be in on the next boat," he said; and Ramon seemed quite satisfied with this.

The Captain's thought was that Ramon ought to be got away: the island was no longer a proper place for him. In his mind he even went so far as to decide that if Ramon's discharge did not come on the next

boat he would have the surgeon return him to the States on the ground of disability.

To Victoriano the Captain said: "Your chance has come at last!" And he indicated by a gesture the vessel which lay off the island at anchor.

However, Victoriano seemed oddly unresponsive; certainly not delighted. He asked with a certain difficulty: "Would Ramon be going back on that boat?" And when he was informed that this was not to be, he added a little stolidly:

"If you don't mind, I think I'll stay on now—until Ramon goes back."

CHAPTER XXVI

HOW TRINIDAD VALVERDE AND HIS DAUGHTER COME AGAIN TO THEIR HOME IN THE DESERT

PEACE reigned in the ranchhouse everywhere save in the heart of Trinidad Valverde, who was old.

Spring had come and the valleys along the Rio Grande, viewed at a little distance, were delicately green, as if a thin veil had fallen upon them. It was evening and a hawk was in the sky, very high up, while a covey of quail, speeding through the dusk, sought shelter for the night. The bells of Piedras Negras could be heard faintly, and a locust, early harbinger of days of drought, fiddled in a distant mesquite tree.

There was suppressed excitement among the people of the house and ranch. This was because they had learned during the day that Victoriano had come back from his wanderings, and that somewhat mysteriously Ramon had come back from the war at the same time. They had gathered somehow that both Victoriano and Ramon were coming to visit the ranch that night.

For an hour Trinidad Valverde and his daughter had sat together on the great veranda of their home. A mounted messenger had come during the day to bring word that Victoriano and Ramon had come back to Eagle Pass. They were expecting the wanderers to appear at any moment now.

Fidesia, her heart suggesting a thousand fears, asking a thousand questions, had planned a homely wel-

come. She had given unusual thought to selecting a dress to wear. She had dressed in white, with delicate coral ornaments at her throat and wrists. Yet the girlish effect of this was like a pretty masquerade. She was no longer a girl. During the past year she had become a woman. Something regal had come into her eyes, into her presence. In repose she seemed almost a little austere. As her father's power had diminished her own had increased. Her responsibilities had multiplied; she knew how to give orders in a low, firm voice which was never denied. She had learned how to make quick decisions in practical affairs. She was entirely familiar with the problems of the irrigation plant and the ranch as a whole.

She turned presently with a solicitude which had become habitual to see why her father had remained silent so long. Sometimes now he fell asleep in his chair.

He had not fallen asleep in this instance. He had looked out upon the delicate green which made the desert beautiful, and he had smiled. It was a delusion, that delicate green; it was a promise which he knew very well would have no fulfilment. It was a sort of mockery. Yet he assured himself that he was not fooled. He was old and wise. He knew the value of that promise which had been made and broken every year. He looked at his daughter, sitting a little regally in the dusk, and his smile faded. One could not entertain a mocking mood while beholding her. She was lovely; she was perfect. The thought of such loveliness in a world filled with snares troubled him deeply.

He arose and wandered through the house and out toward the corrals. He got a dark satisfaction in believing that Fidesia was going to disappoint him in

his old age. She was going to marry Ramon. They were both coming—Victoriano and Ramon—and she had said no word of love or preference for either. But was he not old and wise? And hadn't life always tricked him in the end? She would marry Ramon, and a new voice of authority would be set up in the house: a voice no more respectable than a squeak. So he mused.

Beyond doubt Trinidad Valverde had done unwisely in going back to Spain. By doing so he had lost an illusion and had gained nothing. He had believed he might recapture something of his lost youth by revisiting the scenes of his boyhood. Instead, he made the discovery that youth was gone, never to return.

The journey had been filled with unhappy incidents. He had known well enough that he would no longer be recognized. He was saddened to discover that he was not even remembered. There were numbers among his old playmates, children he had loved and magnified in his mind, who scarcely remembered his name. They recalled it with difficulty; they asked a few polite questions; they passed on out of his life forever. He realized then that they had gone from his life forever in that long-ago year when he had quit his native land.

His daughter was more cordially received than he: she had the present to commend her, while he had, to them, only the past. She was startling and amusing to those circles to which he could claim entrance. But she was not received as a returned, a restored, daughter, but rather as an American girl on a visit. In the village of his boyhood, his beloved Pamplona (the Cantabrian mountains seemed quite unimpressive when he saw them again), she proved to be not even amusing. She was too strange. When he took her to call

on ancient men and women he had known so long ago they received her deferentially, and tried to think of things to say; and then uncomfortable silences fell. They politely brought refreshments; and Fidesia, her eyes roving, noted how shadowy the houses were, and how startling was the effect of the barred windows which seemed to shut out the gardens and the sun. It seemed that her spoon made a loud noise in her cup. She would drink no wine; she accepted tea, and felt the mild resentment caused by her choice.

Valverde soon found causes for unhappiness which greatly exceeded the inevitable fact that he had been forgotten. He speedily realized that he was no longer in sympathy with the men of his own race. They spoke scornfully and maliciously of the American people, whom they considered rapacious and ignorant. They had accepted all the old traditions. He found himself helplessly furious in the presence of prejudices which he knew others could have combated, though he had no words in which to do so.

He came to the conclusion—with something very like dismay—that he was no longer a Spaniard. He had become an American. He had learned to appraise things through his daughter's eyes. He had no home in Europe any more—no place. His home was in that lonely ranchhouse on the Rio Grande where—alas!—old age had come to dwell with him.

He remained in Spain less than six months. Fidesia was reluctant to abandon their original plan of remaining a year. At her father's age, any change would seem unwelcome at first; but if he remained in his native land until he got adjusted he would derive from his visit all the delights to which he had looked forward. That was her thought.

As for herself, she was enjoying each day. Her

experiences were surprising and strange. Spain was to her a fascinating museum, with many of the exhibits appealing to her subtly through channels other than the senses. She felt their hereditary appeal. Spending days in cities was like having a place in a pageant. She had known almost nothing of the life of cities. She was awed by the great churches: their mystic architecture, their solemn organs, their loud bells; and by the vineyards, where wine was robbed of its glamor, and by the harbors, where each ship carried a different flag. Yet gradually all these things began to suggest to her a trade rather than an ideal. Even the churches, with their magnificence, were like the carrying on of a business, confined within the bounds of an elaborate ritual. She thought of the desert, and of Padre Columbo, and of God. She became homesick.

She hid this from her father. She would have prevailed upon him to remain. But he had made up his mind to go home. His secret fear was that his daughter was responding to some whispered call in her heart, that she was becoming at home in this land which was not her home. He would not think of her as Spanish. Life might be filled with sadness everywhere; but at any rate she should continue to be an American, and live where paths yet ascended and where so much of the land was not given over to tombs and ghosts.

He was restrained from turning back almost immediately by the thought of what his neighbors along the Rio Grande would say if he reappeared among them so soon after bidding them a solemn and ceremonious farewell. It would be difficult and painful to explain to them why he had not remained away longer. However, toward the end of the fourth month of his visit

he came into Fidesia's presence one morning and announced with energy that they were going to start home that day. He had engaged passage, he had attended to everything.

She was not surprised. She said gently, "You know, you may never come back again?"

"I shall never come back," he replied with decision. "It is not my country, Fidesia, nor yours. We are both far from home."

She considered this with pleasant warmth. He meant it; and it bound them together more closely. There was nothing between them now, not even his past. They were both Americans. She rested her hands in her lap on a heap of delicate fabrics she had been examining and looked up at him, smiling with an almost maternal softness. "Well," she said, "I am ready."

They left Spain barely in time to do so without embarrassment. Before they were half-way across the Atlantic an American man-of-war had been destroyed in a port where many Spanish were, and immediately afterward the two nations were at war.

Fidesia arose in her place on the veranda and looked into the front room. Where had her father gone? She would have preferred to have him remain, now that Victoriano and Ramon might be expected at any moment. He really ought to be there to welcome them. She wondered if he had forgotten that they were coming.

Her face clouded slightly. That was the one distressing change which had occurred in her father. His memory had failed him. His lapses made him seem very old indeed. It had got so that he sometimes turned the water into the sluiceways and forgot, so

that the miniature canals were overflowed and harm was done. He always lost his temper when this occurred, though there was no one to blame but himself. He also repeated things: telling the same story over and over again and describing incidents a second and a third time. He mislaid things and could not find them. He seemed to regard all this not as a natural weakness of age, but rather as a conspiracy directed against him.

She entered the house, but he was nowhere about. She went on through the house and out toward the corral. She decided, with a fleeting frown of regret, that he must have walked down toward the river to look after something.

She paused before one of the buildings where she had heard sounds of distress during the day. She knew her dog was there, and that for two days it had been unable to climb down the three steps leading to the ground. She climbed the steps and went into the building, entering the shadowy corner where Diana lay, confronted by one of nature's problems in multiplication. She bent over and looked into two great, clear eyes. She heard the tapping of a tail on the floor. The one major whimpering of the early hours of the day had given place to several minor whimperings. There were puppies there between Diana's paws, everywhere, rummaging about her blindly, greedily.

She picked up one of the puppies, realizing that Diana was regarding her minutely, alertly. She was thrilled by the soft, warm ball of fur in her hands. She held it almost reverently, with a delicious sense of its helplessness. She put it back and caressed the mother-dog, which licked her hand.

She emerged from the building and stood erect, her eyes filled with dreams. She was thankful for the

blessed mysteries of nature, which was forever giving even if it could not guarantee. It seemed to her that life was miraculous and splendid, not because of its fulfilments but because of its uncertainties. Life would scarcely be worth living at all if one might know what a day would bring forth. There was always a veil; there was a veil at the end. One thing was certain: she had just received proof of it. The world would always be young, no matter how often it seemed to grow old.

At last she heard hoofs on the trail away in the dusk, which was deepening speedily.

She returned to the veranda and leaned back in her chair, trying to compose herself—to make it appear that she had been pleasantly dreaming and resting, just as she had done many times before in the same place and at the same hour.

In a moment two riders had alighted; and one of the men of the place, hearing the sound of hoofs, had come around to lead the horses back to the corral.

Victoriano and Ramon were coming up the steps.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW FIDESIA HEARS TWO TALES OF THINGS SEEN AND DONE AND HOW SHE MAKES A DECISION

THEY had become as strangers, she to them and they to her. All had acquired a quality of strangeness from the ways in which they had recently walked. They were not the same persons who had met in that house before, though perhaps they were bound to their earlier selves and deeds.

She had greeted them as they came upon the veranda: warmly, yet with a quietude which they did not understand. She led the way into the house: she wished to see them by a good light, and of course they would wish to see her, too. Some one was just bringing in a lighted lamp as they entered the room; and Ramon, observant of trifles, noted that the woman who did this placed the lamp on the table without seeing what she did. She had eyes only for Victoriano.

The woman went away, looking back for another glance at Victoriano. Then the three persons who remained in the room stood in silence for a moment: Victoriano and Ramon gazing, with deep emotions stirred, at Fidesia, and she with a tender tranquillity returning their gaze.

Fidesia's strangeness troubled Victoriano and Ramon. The white dress and the red coral they did not note; something aloof in her, a kind of firmness and reserve, filled their minds.

And yet she was deeply moved. It had seemed to her that she had come to know her mind and heart perfectly. That had been a fable of merit which Padre Columbo had related to her. The personality of one of these two men had become more and more distinct since their day of parting. One she had come to love with all her heart. The other she should always be able to think of pleasantly as a friend. She had also awakened to the fact that she could not leave her father for the present, not for any reason. His fondness for her, his dark moods, his infirmities, his need of her—she could not forget these. His work must not be abandoned; yet he would never turn his responsibilities over to an outsider, he would never yield his authority. There was no one but herself to carry on his work; and she could do this by employing constant tact, by hiding from him the fact that she had really assumed charge.

It had seemed to her not a very difficult matter to solve every part of her problem. One of the two hearts offered her she would accept as the heart of a friend; the other she would accept as the heart of a lover—but a lover who must wait awhile.

But at the first sight of them in the lighted room she knew that all her conclusions had been based upon an imperfect foundation. These were different men from the men who had gone away. She would have to judge them anew, perhaps differently. Her heart stood still as she looked from one to the other, and from one to the other again. Their natures had been deeply furrowed, perhaps even to some extent blasted. Of old their gravity had been as a pleasing mask hiding impetuous youth. Now their eager faces seemed a mask hiding an abysmal gravity.

Victoriano looked beyond her, his glance wandering. "Where's Trinidad?" he asked.

The question restored her to herself. "He's here," she replied. "I mean, he's not away." She indicated one chair and another, and when they were all seated she said with a certain brightness, "I didn't know how long a year could be!" She added with soft solicitude, "You've changed—both of you."

Ramon's smile made him seem more like himself. The almost elfish expression of old was on his lips. "You've changed, too, Fidesia," he said. He turned to Victoriano. "Don't you think so?" he asked.

"I can't say I see any difference," said Victoriano. She had always been surprising to him, always changing from day to day. He could scarcely remove his eyes from her. There was something almost incredulous in his manner, as if he could not believe in his good fortune in being here again. Being in her presence transformed him, drove him into a normal channel. She was the woman for him, not for Ramon. Those doubts he had entertained when Ramon had revealed unexpected merits were now dispelled. She was not merely nice; she was strong. Nature had fashioned her for a strong man's mate.

A kind of solemnity settled upon them. They became not as young people having light weapons to conceal a grave combat, but as primitive souls with a proper setting in that somber room with its medieval rafters and shadows.

Fidesia was thinking: "Why did they come together?" It seemed to her that it would have been easier for all of them if they had come one at a time. She sensed something of mystery in their having come home together, in their having come to the ranch together. She looked at Victoriano, who seemed strange-

ly and unhappily self-conscious. He was holding his arms in a peculiar way, she thought. The yearning expression in her eyes drove Ramon to speech.

"I wrote you letters when you were in Spain," he said, striving for a casual tone.

Her hand closed almost painfully on the arm of her chair. She seemed to hear his voice for the first time since he had come. What could have given it that hidden note of anguish?

"We came home in just a few months," she said. "The letters wouldn't have been forwarded, perhaps—because of the war."

"You knew I went into the army?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Every one in Eagle Pass knew that."

There was silence again; and suddenly she said impulsively, "I want to know what's happened. Everything." She was thinking to herself in sad bewilderment, "What can have changed them so?"

Ramon turned to Victoriano almost with the old bantering effect. "Shall I tell her?" he asked, "or will you?" He turned to Fidesia and added, "It's Victoriano's story rather than mine, though they run together a good bit."

"You tell her," said Victoriano.

Ramon began the story of his adventures and Victoriano's. He speedily brought the narrative to the point where he had found Victoriano in the jungle.

Fidesia interrupted: "How did you get there?" she asked, gazing incredulously at Victoriano. Her heart sank at the thought that she had been responsible for this.

"I was just knocking about," he said.

"Go on, Ramon," she said.

While Ramon took up the narrative again Victoriano sat partly in shadow, his eyes alternately on Fidesia's face and on the door through which Trinidad Valverde

might be expected to enter. What was keeping Valverde? Gradually he relaxed. Here he was again where he had longed to be. And how good it was to be here! No more to wander, no more to be alone! His mind reviewed the far track of his adventures; he retraced it step by step. He beheld the image of a ship again, and of Captain Hogg, the poor sailor who had gone mad. He stirred in his chair, contemplating the end of Hogg's story. He had seen the unhappy sailor once more after his departure from Bongao. He and Ramon had taken passage on a vessel making the voyage from Hong Kong to San Francisco. And one day at sunset as he had sat by the rail gazing away eastward, toward America, toward home, he had been startled by a strangely familiar voice. Captain Hogg had taken his place near him; he was leaning on the rail. Incredible as it seemed, he had had no question to put to Victoriano. He had remarked in a garrulous manner, as if he were talking to himself, "I'm taking her home at last." A similar encounter had taken place the following night, in the same place. On this occasion Victoriano had asked: "To San Francisco?" And the Captain had replied: "To New England." And on the following night the Captain had appeared again, silently, mysteriously, and had said—after a long silence: "In the hold. In her coffin." Victoriano had not seen the Captain again.

He glanced up heavily—to find Fidesia's eyes fixed on him in anguish. "Victoriano!" she cried.

He brought himself together. He did not understand that passionate cry. He looked at Ramon inquiringly. Ramon, smiling wanly, said: "I had just got to the place where the chap with the long knife got after you."

"Oh!" said Victoriano. He moved uncomfortably,

adjusting his arms. "You mustn't think, Fidesia——" he began; and then he checked himself. He must not belittle the story. He must permit Ramon to relate it in full—because of the credit it reflected upon Ramon. He gazed in embarrassment at the floor; and Ramon's voice, too sprightly a vehicle for the load it carried, went on.

That cry of Fidesia's was in Victoriano's heart. She loved him! And knowing her to be within his reach, his mind wavered again. After all, he had less to offer Fidesia than he had had when he went away, and it was clear to him that Ramon had more. Ramon's voice and manner were bringing back a clearer sense of his quality to Victoriano. He was sound and straight. He was not at all the fair-weather creature he might have seemed in other days. As for himself, a secret fear had darkened his mind. His arms had never got wholly right since they had been hacked to pieces. Something had been severed. He had not regained his former strength. The surgeon was not sure that he should ever do so. He could not lift his arms above his head, save by an effort. Something of his old pride in his strength was gone. And it had always been part of his creed that a man had no right to a woman unless he could defend her, unless he could carry her through storms, unless he could defy every one.

Something that Ramon was saying caught his ear. He realized anew that Ramon's gift of words was something to admire rather than to hold in contempt. Deeds were good, certainly; but it was also well to know how to describe a deed nicely, justly, with a picture or a story put in now and then.

He moved almost angrily in his chair. That was all very well, he argued with himself anew, but the ques-

tion of mating involved two persons. And was the woman to forsake the man because misfortune had struck him? She wouldn't. She wouldn't when that woman was Fidesia.

He realized that Ramon had concluded his recital and that both Ramon and Fidesia were looking at him as if they expected him to speak.

"And what have you to tell, Victoriano?" asked Fidesia.

The question and her manner of asking it brought a slow smile to his eyes. "I think Ramon has told all," he said. "And he talks better than I do." He glanced at Ramon without rancor. He added slowly: "I'd rather hear you talk, Fidesia; and if it's your pleasure, I think there's something special you have to say to us."

She did not pretend not to understand, though perhaps she would have liked to do so. She shrank from saying what she had to say. How could she bear to add to their unhappiness now, when they had only just come back to a place of healing and peace? And yet how was she to avoid doing so?

Ramon, perceiving her reluctance, tried to make it appear that it was really a simple task which confronted her. "We've come back for your verdict," he said, "both prepared to abide by it."

Victoriano added: "We've come back good friends—better friends than when we went away. You needn't fear to speak."

When she still hesitated, gazing at them with kind eyes, Ramon said: "We came back together—to you, I mean—because we went away together. It was our thought that neither should have any advantage over the other; and if our coming together seems to you a little strange, we hope you'll excuse that."

Victoriano nodded. That was well said, he thought.

She clasped her hands in her lap and gazed before her musingly. "I think," she said at last, "my condition was that you were to bring back something——"

When she broke off Ramon said punctiliously, "And the one who brought it back in larger measure——"

Victoriano glanced at him with silent remonstrance. It was Fidesia's time to speak.

"Surely you can guess what that was!" she said.

Ramon became almost excited, like a clever child playing a game; but Victoriano said, with a slight tremor in his voice, "We want to hear you say, Fidesia."

Again she gazed dreamily before her; and at length she said: "Nothing really matters but a gallant heart . . ." She paused and then added, "That was what I coveted. And now that you have both come back——" She looked from one to the other, her eyes beaming with affection and pride. And then—"Which of you has been the more gallant?" she asked.

She had found a path on which to tread now; and when neither would speak she continued: "Ramon, did Victoriano bear himself gallantly in all that he did while you were together?"

Ramon no longer smiled. He replied earnestly: "He bore every hardship and peril without complaint. I never knew a man more steadfast."

Fidesia's eyes beamed through swift tears. But Victoriano hung his head as if in shame.

"And you, Victoriano," she said, "what have you to say of Ramon?"

He lifted his eyes slowly and replied: "In everything he did he was a man; and twice he gave me back my life."

Ramon's eyes beamed with pleasure. He nodded thoughtfully. Yes, that was true.

It seemed that Fidesia could not speak for a little while. She was swept by a wave of emotion. Then she said: "Surely you must both see that I could not place one of you above the other! You've both been so splendid, you've both suffered so——" She appealed to them both: "You see, I can't make a choice!"

Victoriano said steadily: "You mean, you will have neither of us?"

When she did not reply he added firmly, "That won't do." He was assuming that there was no one else, that her rejection of them both would mean that she meant to sacrifice herself. And that was not to be considered for an instant.

"It must do," she said. And guessing what was in his mind she added, "If you could see it as I do! You see, having neither, I shall have both."

He frowned. Having neither she would have no one: it was so he saw it. He was wondering why Ramon did not speak up—Ramon, who could put things so cleverly. But Ramon, not more than half convinced that this position of Fidesia's was not a stratagem of some sort, was willing to remain silent. Victoriano's remonstrance pleased him secretly, for he guessed that to seek to coerce Fidesia was to lose her.

"I shall have both," she continued. "Throughout your lives I shall possess you; I shall have pride in all that you both do and are. Even when you are married I shall possess you, and I shall possess your children, too."

Victoriano said: "I shall marry no one but you. I shall wait for you."

That was well said, Ramon thought. It would please Fidesia. He said, "Of course, we shall both wait." He tried to laugh lightly, as if he perceived the ab-

surdity of the suggestion. But when he laughed Fidesia involuntarily closed her eyes. If he would only not seek to appear gay and happy, with that hidden suffering showing through! His gaiety and laughter were as a mask beyond which she could see a child dying of hunger. Something obscure in her nature made him seem indescribably pathetic when he was gay with a gaiety which was forced. She could not bear his courage, now that he seemed somehow stricken, any more than she could have borne to see Victoriano tremble and quail. The mother in her nature brooded over Ramon's wounds just as the wife in her thrilled at something irresistible and dominating in Victoriano's silently purposeful presence.

"Neither of you must wait," she said decisively. She added after a pause, "I haven't informed you yet, but my father——"

She broke off in dismay. There was a step without and in a moment Trinidad Valverde appeared in the doorway.

Standing so he tried to seem a little surprised. He was unaffectedly delighted. "Ah, Victoriano!" he exclaimed; and he advanced and took Victoriano's hand and held it a moment, his eyes frankly scrutinizing the man before him. Then like a well-mannered host he turned to Ramon. "Welcome back, Ramon!" he said.

But Ramon knew that the light in Valverde's eyes, now slowly fading, had been a tribute to Victoriano rather than to himself. He felt saddened. It was only by an effort that he spoke happily, blithely. "It is good to be here again," he said. But the darkness of impending defeat was in his voice, in his eyes. And Fidesia, whom nothing escaped, smiled at him.

Ramon seemed for the moment to be giving all his attention to his host. He cautioned himself against a

betrayal of the fact that he was shocked to note how greatly Valverde had aged. He put on the air of one who is unaware of anything sad or strange.

Victoriano, on the contrary, was gazing with unconcealed solicitude at Valverde. He was marveling that in only a little more than a year a strong man could have become really aged, almost infirm.

Valverde's voice was but the echo of the old robust, proud tones. His iron-gray mustache had thinned and whitened. The old expression, suggesting a kind of tempered ferocity, had given place to something akin to bewilderment. He was trembling slightly: his walk to the river had overtaxed him. He was eager to be seated, perhaps with the hope of covering his infirmity.

"Now let's hear all about it," he continued with a sad attempt at bluffness. He glanced politely at Ramon, and then with a beam of affection toward Victoriano, upon whom his eyes continued to rest. But because it was inevitably Ramon who began to speak, the old man was soon nodding in his chair.

Ramon pretended not to note this, but it seemed to him to indicate the time for him and Victoriano to go. He quickly brought to a close what he was saying, and remarked: "Well, Victoriano?"

Victoriano understood. "I guess it's time," he said.

They arose to go. Valverde quickly affected a complete wakefulness, but Fidesia had already arisen. She stood beside her father when he arose heavily from his chair. Victoriano and Ramon were thinking of her less just at that moment than of the strange and sad fact that Trinidad Valverde was a broken and feeble old man. Fidesia's thoughts, even her affections, seemed to be centered about her father. She stood apart from him, leaving him unsupported. Any other attitude would have offended him. But half a step

behind him she was regarding him anxiously, solicitously.

Victoriano and Ramon went away, and presently she heard the beat of hoofs. Two riders were leaving the ranch, moving in opposite directions. She slipped out to the dark veranda as soon as her father was seated. Ramon was riding back to Eagle Pass; Victoriano was riding to his home. She could discern the obscure figures on the two trails. She looked after Ramon. He was riding with a great clatter. Her face softened like a mother's. She turned and gazed after Victoriano, who was riding more slowly, more sedately. She assumed a different attitude now. She held her head high; her clasped hands were lifted to her breast; her expression became set with a deathless yearning. Her heart was following Victoriano through the night.

She went back into the house; she stood musing for a moment, and then she went to her father's room to make sure that nothing affecting his comfort had been neglected. She turned the cover down and adjusted the pillow. She heard her father's deliberate steps approaching the room, and she seemed serene and happy when he entered. It did not seem to her terrible that a strong man should one day lose his strength. She rejoiced rather that though her father was becoming feeble, her love for him was unchanged.

Valverde seemed for an instant himself as he straightened up and looked at her. "Well, Fidesia," he said, "which of them is it to be?"

"Which of them?" she echoed vaguely, her eyes downcast.

"Victoriano or Ramon?"

She came and took his hand and pressed it to her cheek. "It's to be you, father," she said.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOW VICTORIANO AND RAMON MEET FOR THE LAST
TIME AND HOW PADRE COLUMBO LOOKS INTO THE
FUTURE

THE lights of Eagle Pass were burning cheerfully as Ramon rode into the town. There were convivial sounds on the streets, beyond open doors. On the main street a brazier glowed where an *anciana* presided over the stew of pepper and meat and beans which men were eating out in the open. But the glamor of that picture, the picture of life persisting in being gay despite its stark environment, had passed for Ramon. He could not even think of any one he cared to encounter—though the time had been when he had had a cordial word for every one in that place. He did not even wish to meet any of the customs men with whom he had formerly spent happy days. He would not try for the customs service again. That had been a pose of his—his engaging in the work of the revenue men. All work had been a pose with him. And now that pose seemed to have been unprofitable. He might just as well have stuck to the old point of view, he thought: of looking on curiously and with amusement while other men contended for little results and childish rewards.

He arrived at the hotel unseen and turned his horse over to one of the stablemen. The horse was the splendid Selim of other days, left in the care of the

hotel people during his absence. He avoided meeting any one about the hotel. He went up to the second-story veranda; and in its reposeful shadows he found an easy chair, hospitable by reason of its advanced age.

Here he worked out a conclusion which had been taking form in his mind ever since he rode away from the ranch. He ought to go away. There was scarcely any hope that the situation in which he had become involved would change to his advantage. He was an intruder at the Valverdes'. He was an intruder in this remote and isolated town. His presence in it was a kind of impertinence. He had never been one of its citizens, really. He had been watching them: in a sense, spying on them. He had listened with a smile to others' points of view, reserving his own.

He thought of Trinidad Valverde. It occurred to him that it was Valverde who had thwarted him. Not by reason of his strength, but because of his feebleness. Fidesia was unwilling to leave him, now that he had become almost like a child. He recalled with a sinking heart the manner in which old Trinidad had betrayed his preference for Victoriano—his seeming to imply that Victoriano's return was all that mattered.

More fatal still to his peace of mind was the thought, which he could not wholly put aside, that perhaps Valverde was right. He, Ramon, was an alien to the manner of life which the ranch people lived and knew. On the other hand, Victoriano was of the very fabric of that life. Victoriano had known Fidesia and her father many years; and, moreover, Victoriano was precisely the man to make a suitable husband, according to border standards. Was he not, in truth, the sort of man to make an ideal husband from almost any normal point of view? There was a certain simplicity and downrightness about him which would make

smooth to his feet the path on which another man would stumble.

He tried to analyze Victoriano impartially. Victoriano did not know what it was to be uncertain, to hesitate, to form impersonal judgments, to be cynical. He was of the stuff of which clans are made: and was not the family in a sense a clan? He would be certain, throughout his life, to believe in his own, to fight for it, to be more or less blind to the merits of any cause which menaced it. If he had children he would know how to govern them, how to decide for them, how to give to them and how to deny them. He would never be in doubt. He would always be hospitable and neighborly, even toward persons who bored him. He would always be ready to be one of a posse when a crime against the established order was committed. He would always be rather stern, yet good-natured in a way, and he would always be courageous. In him courage would not be a merit but a trait. The subtleties of language would never betray him. He would go through life saying Yes and No. His smile would always be genuine, his anger never a pose, but a passion.

*As for himself, Ramon realized that he had never cared to move down the straight thoroughfare of life with the slogans and banners and popular virtues. He had liked to stand aside watching the procession, criticizing it mockingly, holding in scorn its futility, seeing too clearly its disappointing goal. The primitive functions of life were almost appalling to him. There was the rearing of children. He would fear the catastrophes incidental to the rearing of children. He would have too little confidence in the outcome of events. He would think about it all too much. It seemed to him

that it must end in his running away if he should ever have a child who was perverse or ungovernable.

They might be blind fools who toiled with hope, who put their faith in destiny. There might be something horribly comic in those who followed the law of instinct, following it so consistently that they almost ceased to reason or reflect, save in conventional channels. Nevertheless, it occurred to him that they were more nearly right than they who feared and doubted, for at least they were eligible to the rewards of a delusion, while the cynic spectators of life were wholly ineligible to rewards, save the satisfaction they derived from their derision and conceit.

It might be that Victoriano would have only a delusion to offer Fidesia; but what had he himself to offer her? She already had nearly all the things that were necessary to her happiness. He should be likely to take rather than to give, unless he cared to settle down to life on the ranch, in which he was not really interested, and to the companionship of Valverde, who did not approve of him.

And after all—he reflected—Victoriano was a fellow one could not help liking. One could not help wishing him the best of luck.

He would go away. He would leave the delusion to Victoriano and Fidesia. He would do this voluntarily. He smiled wryly to himself as he added: "Voluntarily, because I haven't anything to gain by staying." It occurred to him that if he disappeared utterly Valverde might prevail upon his daughter to look favorably upon Victoriano. He would do this by the magic of believing that a thing must come to pass. Valverde was of the world of simple men also, he thought. How else could one explain his bewildered attitude toward the ravages of old age? He was not

philosophically accepting the inevitable. He was like a creature caught in a trap.

These were the conclusions to which he held throughout the night, though again and again as he lay awake his heart rebelled against his reasoning. He, too, betrayed the fact that he was a creature of instinct. He did not wish to surrender the hope of winning Fidesia. She was altogether lovely and kind, she was matchless. He had a right to her if he could win her.

Throughout the night he was never too sound asleep to hear the diminishing noises of the town; the calls of sentries on the government reservation near by; the wild shouts of drunken Mexicans, lying out in the mesquite groves down toward the river, with their bottles of mescal for company; the whistle of locomotives crossing the International bridge over the Rio Grande. He dreamed of home: of his indulgent father, generous and kind yet self-centered; of his mother, who suffered the malady of imagining hardships because she experienced none that were genuine; of his sensible sister, mature beyond her years.

It would be interesting to go home, he thought; interesting for a day or two. But what afterward?

He arose before day, preparing with his wonted fastidiousness to go out. To go out? Where? It did not matter, so that he got out, so that he went away. It occurred to him that a long walk on one of the lonely trails might help. But to what end? The thought of returning to the hotel, weary and discouraged, was not to be borne. He would go quite away. He would walk as far as the junction touched by the Southern Pacific railroad. There would be no train running out of Eagle Pass for hours. He would walk

to the junction and take a train for—anywhere. He would be done with the border.

He left word with the hotel people to have his horse and dog shipped to his father in San Antonio. He went out into the stables to bid his dumb friends good-by. The dog whined and would have followed him. The horse held his small ears smartly erect, his head high; his eyes were brightly soft, his nostrils distended; he whinneyed as his master went away.

He was dressed lightly, his heaviest burden being the revolver of his old inspector days, which he carried in its holster under his coat. It was the weapon which had been given him by one of the old river guards, and his thought was to return it as he went away, if he had the chance. But because it was so early, he encountered no one he knew: no one by whom he could send the weapon and a message to the old guard.

He walked through the town and out of it unseen. It yet lacked half an hour to sunrise. The world was cool and still, with the freshness of the night's dew yet upon it.

He climbed the pallid road which passed the convent outside the town. He bore away purposefully toward the distant junction. He knew that he should come presently upon a main trail which brought together a score of minor trails from all directions, from isolated settlements, from lone jacals, from ranches.

Vigor arose within him with the rising of the sun. Once he looked back over the town and valleys where he had spent a period very like boyhood—before he had ever dreamed of coming into a No-Man's-Land of dark despair. Then he set his face resolutely toward the north.

The sun came up, bringing instantly the quality of remorselessness, of tragedy. It touched the dews and

they were gone. It bounded above the horizon fiercely, its appetite unappeasable.

Ramon presently perceived that the trail he followed ran parallel with a long spur of earth and stone at his left, barren even of the sage and cactus which formed the region's hardiest vegetation. In some prehistoric age the earth, in its rage or caprice, had cast up this barren ridge to stand through all eternity under the withering heat of summer's sun and the onslaught of the winter's northers.

He paused a moment. He had come upon a scene which a faithless artist might have sought in his darkest moods: a scene of blasted life and triumphant death. To the left was that long barren spur; to his right a number of ancient water-holes surrounded by bleached bones of beasts. Before him was the stark trail leading northward.

Suddenly he lifted his head in a listening attitude. He had heard the beat of a man's feet on the baked earth not far from him.

The sound disturbed him. It was an intrusion, and it was also a little strange. It was early for men to be abroad. It was true that one might expect to encounter a Mexican in the desert anywhere, at any time. They were often solitary, driven creatures, miserably poor and restless. But something informed him that his invisible neighbor of the moment was not a Mexican. The tread he heard was purposeful and firm; it was that of a man wearing good shoes.

Soon he caught sight of something moving over on the other side of the low spur. A man's hat was visible. It was the hat of an American, and it moved forward with an undulating steadiness in keeping with that purposeful tread.

He could not have explained the agitation which

seized him. To be sure, it was strange that he should come upon an American in this stricken region at so early an hour. But his agitation was out of proportion to the cause. Prescience was at work; he was sure that other pilgrim was one he knew.

He went forward, closely watching that hat which moved forward in his own direction on the other side of the spur. For a time nothing more than the hat was visible. It was not until he came to the end of the spur—to the point where the two trails running on opposite sides of the spur came together—that he got a view of his fellow. Then he halted in amazement and called out the other's name—

"Victoriano!"

Victoriano stopped. He did not seem surprised. He knew the desert too well to be amazed by anything it revealed. He said simply: "You're stirring early."

"Yes. I've a long distance to go."

When Victoriano did not ask him to explain he added: "I'm leaving Eagle Pass. I'm getting out of the neighborhood altogether."

He perceived something like opposition in the expression in Victoriano's eyes, the framing of a protest. He added: "It's plain enough that I'm one too many here. It's my idea to leave the field to you."

He could not banish bitterness wholly from his voice; and though he spoke with affected affability, that quality was lacking in candor.

Victoriano said slowly: "That's strange. The same thought has been running in my mind. I was just clearing out myself."

There was his downrightness again, his refusal to profit in secret by the other's surrender and retreat.

Ramon laughed somewhat too loudly. He stood taking in the other man with an incredulous air. With

a swift movement of his hand he plucked the bitter smile from his lips, because of Victoriano's quietly tragic air, his haggard eyes. He noted that Victoriano was dressed for traveling; that he wore belt and holster, and that his weapon was in its holster.

"Suppose we talk it over," he said, his manner more genuinely friendly now.

"Yes, we'll do that," said Victoriano.

It was Ramon who led the way to the shady side of the spur, where scattered stones afforded seats. The vista was less stark here. At a little distance three young mesquite trees in a row, in the shade of the spur, were green with leaves and cool with dew. Further away a red ridge with strata of warm-hued stone formed a barrier against those lost expanses which render the desert a scene of brooding death. There was a cleft in the ridge where a trail went through.

"It's all really absurd," said Ramon as they sat down facing each other. "You see, Victoriano, we should have been enemies from the beginning. We ought never to have admitted, even in our secret hearts, that we liked each other. You can see it yourself! Think of the fantastic pass we've come to because of our friendship. We ought to have planted hatred in our hearts and cultivated it. Our plight would have been comparatively simple then."

Victoriano, considering this literally, slowly shook his head. "I see it different," he declared. "I couldn't want to hate a man who had proved himself a good man."

"Nevertheless, you see it wrong," persisted Ramon. "The books are full of it, and little people who think they are smart go about repeating it: that warfare is the law of life. Everything in nature is fighting for dear life. You know it's a fact."

Victoriano waited for him to finish; then he asked thoughtfully, "Which way are you going?"

"I hadn't thought much about it. I'm not sure I'm going—now. At least, we're not both going. Victoriano, pardon me—but I've got a plan."

Victoriano regarded him gravely.

"You mustn't jump to the conclusion that I've gone insane. I may have been talking wildly just now—about our hating each other, I mean. But I'm in earnest now. You see, you and I ought to be thinking about some one else, rather than ourselves. We ought to be thinking of Fidesia. If she is too loyal and generous to turn either of us down it's up to us to do something. We've got to give her a fair deal. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Well, here's my plan: You and I—by the way, I see you're carrying your gun. I wonder why?"

"I'm carrying everything I've got," said Victoriano.

Ramon smiled. "I'm carrying mine, too," he said. "My plan is for us to use our guns. Here. Now. And then one of us will go back to the Rio Grande."

Victoriano simply stared.

"It's very simple," continued Ramon. "It will be supposed that the one who falls killed himself. The other will just have to keep his own counsel."

Victoriano shook his head. "No," he said firmly.

For the first time Ramon considered cunningly how to offend this man. He professed to be sympathetic. "Ah, I see," he said. "Your arms are a bit off yet. Is that it?"

"It is not," said Victoriano, coloring darkly. That was the bitter cup he was forever drinking now: the thought that his arms were ruined.

"Then—please allow me to insist. Not because we

care about it a lot, you understand, but—well, for another's sake. Come, you've always impressed me as being proud of your courage. Let me confess: rather offensively proud. Because, you see, it's mostly a matter of accident, after all. It's not the thing a man should boast of. If you're really game—in a situation where you haven't any advantage—come and take a shot."

Victoriano stared. It seemed monstrous, incredible. They had fought hand in hand against death—through what long, bitter hours which seemed like ages. And now, within a few miles of all they both held most dear, in a land of tranquillity, here was this suggestion that one of them take the life of the other. It would be a form of murder. If he were the victor he should never be able to face Fidesia again, since his hands would be stained. To win was to suffer the greatest loss of all.

In itself the suggestion was one to be rejected indignantly, finally. But the new aspect of Ramon which the suggestion revealed caused Victoriano to pause. What an amazing chap he was, after all! For all his elegance of mind and body, for all his delicacy, how extraordinary was the hardihood he could summon when hardihood was needed! He recalled the tragedy of Tawi Tawi, which would have driven many a man insane. There was something in Ramon which did not show on the surface; and here it was again.

Victoriano had not set forth on this morning's pilgrimage without having thought long and hard. He had not acted lightly when he had resolved at last to leave his native plains behind him and set forth into the strange world, never to look upon his home again. He had weighed Ramon's worth against his own and he had concluded finally that Ramon and not himself

was the man to make Fidesia happy—to insure her happiness all through her life. Ramon's graces of mind would last longer than bodily strength. And there had been in the background of his thoughts the matter which Ramon had just now touched upon. There was that injury to his arms which would remain with him always. He could not be sure, after all, that it was not Fidesia's pity for him which had prevented her from choosing Ramon.

He looked away toward that red-seamed ridge with a cleft in it. Had he seen a figure stirring vaguely in that cleft? Surely not.

He turned to Ramon simply. He was thinking how Ramon had stood between him and death on two occasions, to his own ultimate disadvantage. He could not deny his great debt to Ramon. He did not wish to do so.

"Maybe you're right," he said. "I mean, I guess your plan is as good as any other. I'd never have thought of it myself; but then you're quicker at seeing things than I am."

Ramon started up eagerly. "I thought you'd see it," he said. He took his weapon from its holster and extended it toward Victoriano. "Will you see that my gun's in order?" he asked. "You've got a better eye for such things than mine. And I'll step off the distance."

He placed his weapon in Victoriano's hand. "A dozen paces is the fashionable distance, isn't it?" he asked. He moved away a little on the barren mesa under the morning sun.

Victoriano glanced perfunctorily at the weapon in his hand. It was in perfect order. Then he sat gazing sadly at Ramon, his friend, who in their common perils had proved himself the blithest and most loyal of men.

His heart ached at that moment. He watched with the pride and fondness of an elder brother as Ramon stepped off the dozen paces, marking the extremes with little heaps of sand. Then it seemed that Ramon realized that he had made a miscalculation of some sort. He uttered an exclamation of self-ridicule. "I've made it so that one of us would be looking right into the sun," he explained. "I'll do it over in a different way. Each must have his chance, you know."

Victoriano made no reply. But while Ramon stepped off the dozen paces again he put aside the weapon he held and drew forth his own, which he examined. He glanced at Ramon—furtively, now—and then by a swift movement of wrist and fingers the cartridges were ejected from one of the pistols and thrown away.

When Ramon came back Victoriano arose. "Your weapon," he said. And he placed the loaded weapon in Ramon's hand.

"Thank you," said Ramon. And then, "Now, if you will, we'll shake hands."

"Yes," said Victoriano. He was afraid Ramon might glance at both the weapons and note that something was wrong with one of them. He shook Ramon's hand with an absent air. Then he took his position on the spot which had been determined for him. He carried his weapon tensely in his hand. Perhaps he need not have ejected the cartridges, he thought. Ramon would discover that he had done this—afterward. But fear of himself was not to be wholly conquered. The will to live might assert itself at the end. Instinctively he might turn aside from the course he had adopted. No, it was better that he should be really unarmed in that moment when he stood face to face with Ramon for the last time.

They stood in their places, each holding the other with his eye. Ramon said: "When I've counted three." And Victoriano noted now that his voice was scarcely under perfect control.

"At the count of three," agreed Victoriano.

But before he counted Ramon said, with a twitching smile on his lips, "You think I'm afraid—don't you?"

Victoriano replied simply: "I know you are. But I know you'll go through with it just the same—and I'm not sure but what that's better than not being afraid."

"I don't know whether it's better or not," replied Ramon; "but, anyway, it's the best I've got."

He counted three, then, impressively, in a voice which trembled, though his face wore at the last an expression which was almost coldly placid. The weapons came up together sharply.

There was an instant of terrible suspense and then the ironical end came. There was no report to break the desert stillness. Instead, Ramon's right hand quivered as with palsy; he brought his left hand convulsively to his heart. His white face wore an amazed, incredulous expression.

Victoriano, casting aside his weapon, ran swiftly to where Ramon stood. But Ramon had fallen before he reached him.

That dagger-thrust of pain which had pierced him at Bongao, after the fatal strain of his voyage to Tawi Tawi was lifted, had pierced him again; and for ever more his pains were at an end.

Victoriano carried him into the shade of the spur and placed him in an attitude of peaceful repose. He looked about him, wondering what to do next. Then

he knew that there was in truth a moving figure in that cleft in the far ridge.

Padre Columbo, whose small flock had been decreased by one new-born kid the night before, had been out since before the stars had faded, seeking. Wearied and discouraged, after long and fruitless search, he lifted his eyes just in time to perceive Victoriano approaching with rapid strides.

He smiled into the troubled face of the younger man. "Let me chide you, my son," he said, "for the error you commit."

"The error?" echoed Victoriano.

"No young man should walk with such headstrong speed," said Padre Columbo. "Only the old can afford to walk without pausing to consider the way before them. Only the old are done with guide-posts."

Victoriano turned to look back over the way he had come. "I need no guide-posts to-day," he said. "My way is plain: I must go northward."

Padre Columbo gazed at him piercingly. What did the old seer know? What had he seen? "That way," he replied, "there is a steadfast guide-post, to be sure: the North Star. But it is no more steadfast than the Southern Cross. Turn back, Victoriano."

"The Southern Cross is not to be seen from our valleys," said Victoriano.

The old man replied with his faint, ambiguous smile: "The safest guide-posts are always the invisible ones."

Victoriano shook his head slowly; then in a brisker tone he said, "I must ask a favor of you, Padre Columbo. My friend Ramon lies dead in the shade of the spur yonder. His heart failed him. I must ask you to carry the news to Trinidad Valverde. Break it gently. And—Padre Columbo, please do not say that

you met me here. I have a long journey to go and I can not turn back."

The old prophet reflected. Then he replied: "I shall do as you ask. But—turn back, Victoriano!"

Victoriano looked into his eyes, which were never wholly free of dreams. They seemed very knowing now. "After time passes," he said, "I shall come back."

He would not turn back now. It would seem disloyal to Ramon—even to Fidesia. There must be a period of mourning now, a span of time given only to remembrance and silence. What was that saying he had heard on Tawi Tawi? *I bear my cross*. There were crosses to bear now and each heart must bear its own.

He shook hands with Padre Columbo. The old man would not let him go instantly. Holding his hand he said solemnly: "*Hasta luego*": until later.

"Until later," replied Victoriano, and then he went on his way. In a little time he had disappeared through that cleft in the ridge which shut out the far desert.

The days pass slowly, tranquilly, in the valleys by the river. The months come and go. Trinidad Valverde sits nodding in the long afternoons on his veranda, lulled to sleep by the droning of the locust in the mesquite trees. Sometimes he lifts his head and calls out a name—the name of Fidesia, his daughter. She is seldom far away.

Sometimes she goes as far as the hut of Padre Columbo, and the girl and the seer look away across the trail leading to the north.

"Your story will have a happy ending," is the thought he tries to fix in her mind; and she replies to this:

"Yes, it will have a happy ending, in any case. It is the story that ends with honor that is happy, even if it must end with death."

She continues to look away to the north. "He will come back," she says, her voice breaking sometimes, her eyes filling with tears.

"He will come back," says Padre Columbo, his thin lips smiling benignly and quivering a little.

It is only a hope that Fidesia expresses—that Victoriano will come again out of the north at last and claim her. It is only a prayer.

But Padre Columbo knows.

